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## La Comisión del Estatus de la Mujer (CSW): La eliminación de todas las formas de discriminación y violencia contra las niñas.

Resulta de la mayor importancia el tema abordado en esta 51 sesión de la Comisión del Estatus de la Mujer. Celebramos la voluntad política de los gobiernos del mundo con los derechos humanos de las mujeres. En esta ocasión, los derechos humanos de las niñas. Como ha sido ampliamente documentado, la violación a derechos humanos de mujeres es un hecho frecuente en nuestras diversas sociedades. Con esto, las más afectadas resultan ser las niñas. La violencia en todas sus formas, física, mental y sexual es una realidad cotidiana para las niñas y adolescentes, que requiere ser atendida desde una perspectiva multisectorial, en donde los compromisos internacionales adquiridos se transformen en cambios legislativos, políticas públicas, programas de gobierno, con recursos humanos y financieros y con la participación activa de las niñas. Las niñas, independientemente de cualquier condición, son sujetas de todos los derechos humanos, ciudadanas independientemente de su edad, y como tal deben ser tratadas por los Estados, asegurando espacios seguros de desarrollo y participación, eliminando las barreras culturales, políticas, religiosas, entre otras, que las discriminan y atentan contra sus prerrogativas.

Como jóvenes activistas en el tema de derechos sexuales y reproductivos, estaremos haciendo seguimiento de las negociaciones a lo largo de estas dos semanas. Esperamos que los gobiernos durante estos días se comprometan, sobretudo, con el derecho a una vida sin violencia, que va acompañado del respeto a la diversidad, el derecho a la salud sexual y la salud reproductiva, el derecho a la educación en sexualidad con una perspectiva de género, y con el derecho a la participación de niñas y adolescentes.

Laura Villa, Mexico  
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights/ Ipas

## US Resolution on Forced and Early Marriages

Within the first days of the 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the United States delegation has tabled a resolution on early child marriages. In our discussion of this resolution, we find it important to express the need to change the language from early marriage to forced marriage. The term early marriage is a relative term, and we must remove subjectivity in order to have a clear definition of what we are talking about.

While we, as youth, understand and agree with the harmful effects of any practice that is coerced or not expressly consented within one's capacities as a human being, we want to make sure that all of the issues that are relevant to the forced child marriages are included in the resolution. A comprehensive approach to addressing this pressing issue is the only way to effectively work toward the empowerment and increased capacities of the girl child.

While it is clear that coercion and forced practices are innately tied to issues of an individual's inalienable human rights, we believe the resolution put forth by the United States contains many complexities and omits vital aspects of the issue. Our concern is that the focus of the resolution and its impending calls to action do not adequately address the issue of the girl child's entitlement to human rights. She possesses these rights on her own, as a human being, no matter what kind of domestic environment she lives in.

This resolution must stress the fact that the girl child has agency, and must be able to actively and meaningfully participate in the decision making process for the issues that directly affects her life, such as forced child marriage.

Furthermore, the issue of forced child marriage is inextricably linked to the health and well being of the girl child, and as such, she should be given access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services. Paying attention to the needs of the girl child and the health of her body is paramount to adequately stemming the harmful effects of the practices of forced child marriage.

Additionally, we believe that forced child marriage has detrimental affects on the ability of a girl child or young woman to freely pursue formal and informal education. As such, all levels of education including primary, secondary, and higher levels should be addressed in the resolution.

Lastly, we must stress the need of expressly reaffirming and utilizing the language and decisions of ICPD as well as the Millennium Development Goals when discussing and especially passing a resolution on forced child marriages.

Nicole Juan, United States

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

## Young Child marriage

The right to a good reproductive health includes all aspects of the reproduction process: a satisfying and risk less sexual life, the freedom to decide the number, timing and spacing of pregnancies, the unconditional access to comprehensive information and education on all aspects of sexuality and reproduction and the right to the highest standards of health care.

In many regards, young child marriage violates this right and deprives girls and young women from its various components. It disempowers them, denies to them the right to the full development of their personality and capacities and puts them at high risk of sexually transmitted infections and gynaecological and obstetrical complications.

Assessing the psychological impact of young child marriage on girls is rather challenging, due to the lack of qualitative studies addressing this issue and to the difficulty of conducting such studies. The few data available point out girls 'inappropriate socialization when early married, as a consequence of their remaining "between 2 worlds". They're not ready yet to become adults but at the same time, they can no longer behave as teenagers. This premature loss of adolescence and curtailment of personal freedom that the status of wife implies is responsible of great psychological damages and emotional unbalance that have a far-reaching impact on their family and social life.

Sexuality-wise, since girls are most of the time married to much older and fully physically developed men; they're more likely to experience pain, trauma, violence and sexual coercion and often don't have any say or any control over their sexual life. Also, girls and young women face greater risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections (including HIV) than mature women and many studies have shown that the younger the age at first sexual intercourse and pregnancy, the higher incidence of HIV infection. This is due to biological factors (hormonal fluctuations and a higher permeability of vaginal tissue etc), to cultural factors (widespread belief in some regions that having sex with a young virgin heals from AIDS etc) as well as social and economic factors (gender inequality, poverty, phenomenon of "sugar daddies" etc).

Last but not least, young child marriage is often associated with early childbearing, due to social pressures and to husbands' frequent rejection of contraceptives' use. This leads to an increased risk of per and post-partum dying, premature labour, delivery complications, foetal impairment, low birth-weight and neonatal death. Pregnancy-related deaths are the leading cause of mortality among 15-20 years-old girls in developing countries, as they face up to 200% greater chance of dying in pregnancy than 20-24 years age group and the main causes are per and post partum- haemorrhage, sepsis, and obstructed labour due to the immaturity of the genital tract.

Young child marriage compromises the physical, psychological and social development of girls.

It leads to emotional and psychological damages, social isolation, increased risk of STIs and HIV infection,

early childbearing, maternal morbidity and mortality etc.

A range of policy and programmatic actions are necessary to fight young child marriage and its negative impacts: empowering girls through education and capacity building, raising the legal age at marriage, implementing effective poverty-reduction strategies and raising parents' awareness.

Imane Khachani, Morocco

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

## Gender Bias and Women and Girls' Reproductive Rights

There is a tendency on the part of States at UN meetings, including the meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, to underemphasize women and girls reproductive rights and to not make appropriate commitments to promote and fulfill these. The most that is referred to is reproductive health of married women and girls. States shirk from acknowledging women and girls' rights to decide freely regarding all matters relating to their bodies, reproduction and sexuality. They also hesitate to commit to ensure that all young people have full access to comprehensive sexuality education, which would empower them to make self-affirming decisions regarding relationships, sexuality and reproduction.

What States and civil society should be focusing on is eliminating gender bias and discrimination. If this were to be focused on strongly, then it would affirm women and girls' human rights and prohibit discriminatory practices and all forms of violence against them. The debates focusing on eliminating practices, such as female infanticide, examine the outcomes instead of the root causes, namely gender bias and discrimination.

As this is done, focusing on specific practices like prenatal sex selection runs the risk of compromising women and girls' reproductive rights by limiting informed decisions about reproduction based on the dynamics of their domestic environment and social situation. To highlight this point, current social structures largely limit women and girls' choice to have daughters and children with disabilities and thus, gender biased and disability biased prenatal selection is practiced. Therefore, states and civil society need to make strong efforts to create and strengthen equitable social structures and institutions that place equal value on all humans, irrespective of gender, ability, or any other basis. Strengthening social structures, then, affirms and allows women and girls to make informed decisions regarding their bodies and its reproductive capacities.

Taking a narrow approach and focusing on only one issue at a time fails to completely eliminate harmful practices that violate women and girls' rights. While states typically focus on specific practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages, and female infanticide, they are not focusing on strengthening the institutions and structures to address the overarching and common root causes of such phenomena, i.e.,

gender bias and discrimination. Additionally, these issues are often seen within a framework of being solely traditional and/or cultural practices of particular countries or regions, and not as a global issue that affects women and girls around the world. While the afore-mentioned issues are important to address in the short term, ignoring the overarching problems of gender bias and discrimination will not lead to long term solutions.

Nicole Juan, United States and Neha Sood, India  
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

## Language that Divides

We all know that there are many issues that divide us progressive people from conservatives. Although these issues are rooted in deep philosophical differences and fundamentally different ways on how we view and value life, we express them in the language we use to address certain issues, with words and sentences that many times are value laden and eventually come to be recognized as words belonging to one group or another.

However, there is something inherently wrong with the way language gets used at times, and there is something even more wrong in trying to link some issues to other ones that are in fact not related, just to get our points across. In this case I am referring to the discussions that have been happening at this CSW meeting around the problem of prenatal sex selection due to son preference and female infanticide.

As progressive people, those of us belonging to the sexual and reproductive rights and women's rights movements are completely against any form of discrimination or violence against women. We are also deeply concerned with any social process that may conceivably have a negative effect to the well being of communities in any part of the world. As such, we consider female infanticide a gross violation of human rights, wherever, whenever and for whatever reason it occurs.

On this then, it is clear that conservatives and progressives can agree.

The contentious issue in this meeting has been the one of prenatal sex selection due to son preference. The negative impacts of this widely spread practice in countries such as India and China are clear, with the skewed male to female ratios in the population having negative effects, such as the trafficking of women to areas where the number of women is decreasing. Like I said, since the values that move progressive people are ones that are always concerned with any situation that adversely affects any community or individual, this is also something we are against.

Then what is the problem in reaching an agreement?

The problem lies primarily in how we choose to address problems and how we go around solving them. We believe that problems such as this should be addressed at its root cause. Prenatal sex selection by itself is not

a bad thing. For example, it is ethically justifiable for a 37 year old woman in a developed country who has 4 sons to use artificial reproductive technology to fertilize 4 of her eggs and choose to implant only one that will eventually develop into a girl. The problem in countries like China and India where women are exercising their right to choose to terminate a pregnancy lies in the abominable gender inequalities pervasive in their societies.

Why should a woman, who has lived all her life in a society that discriminates her for the sole fact of being born a woman, feel that giving birth to a girl that will suffer the same discrimination or forms of abuse she did is desirable? No reason. Problems such as this should be tackled at their root cause, with strong policies against gender inequalities, abolition of any law that discriminates against women and the prosecution of any act of violence against women. The attempt of conservative groups to introduce value charged terms such as foeticide (which means nothing), unsustainable concepts like the “right to be born”, or attempting to separate prenatal sex selection from its source in gender inequality are stubborn positions that divide us in areas where we actually may agree.

It is wrong attempting to introduce divisive language into areas where agreement is possible. It is playing with the lives of discriminated women, and it amounts to considering small victories in the power struggle between conservatives and progressives worth the future of women.

Moises Russo, Chile

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights/ International Planned Parenthood Federation

**International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition  
Statement to the Commission on the Status of Women  
Fifty-First Session, 26<sup>th</sup> February- 9<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

Madam Chair and distinguished representatives,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this important session, I am speaking on behalf of the International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition (ISRRC), a group of NGOs with constituencies in all regions of the world. We welcome the theme of the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Report of the Secretary-General – “**the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child**”. Violence against girls (physical, psychological or sexual) is a gross violation of their human rights wherever it occurs - in their homes, schools, communities and places of care. This is, without a doubt, an important opportunity for the global community to take action on this critical issue.

Although we recognize that certain advances have been made in addressing violence and discrimination

against women and girls, governments still have a number of international commitments to fulfill, especially to girls and young women; the lack of attention paid to the link between the barriers to women's and girls' ability to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights and the persistent gender-based violence is a matter that this group is particularly concerned with. We are convinced that it is only with a strong commitment to protect and promote all girls' human rights, in particular their sexual and reproductive rights that we will be able to eliminate discrimination and violence against girls.

Violence against girls is a major concern in and of itself. It is also a root cause of many sexual and reproductive health problems, as it increases the possibilities of unplanned and forced pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections including HIV.

States' failure to protect and guarantee the sexual and reproductive rights of girls, including their right to live free of sexual coercion and violence, has significantly increased the impact of the HIV pandemic for girls and has also placed them in alarmingly vulnerable situations. Universal access to comprehensive sexuality education, in addition to confidential and youth friendly sexual and reproductive health services, is essential in preventing and combating these problems.

Rape, incest and other forms of sexual violence occur in the home, in schools, in places of care, in communities and other settings. Governments, communities, and families are all individually and collectively responsible and mutually accountable to ensure that every child lives in a world free from all forms of violence.

We also urge you to recognize that particular groups of girls are at high risk of severe and multiple forms of discrimination and violence and their rights and needs are often not recognized or addressed. These include girls facing harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation; girls at risk of child marriage and child mothers; girl heads-of-households; girls in child domestic labor; girls affected by slavery-like practices; girls affected by armed conflict, including those associated with fighting forces and child soldiers; girls infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS; girls living in urban slums; refugee and migrant girls; girls affected by natural disasters; refugee, asylum-seeking and internally displaced girls; pastoral and nomadic girls; girls with disabilities; lesbian and bisexual girls; girls not conforming to social norms of gender and sexuality; and girls in detention.

Empowering girls is key to breaking the vicious circle of ill-health and violence. It should be at the center of all actions targeted towards the elimination of violence against women and girls.

In order to fully eradicate violence against girls, we urge member States to:

- Enforce and expand existing legislation so that the full range of human rights of all women and girls are fully protected, respected and fulfilled, including their rights to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and to be free from all forms of violence;
- Reaffirm their commitment to ICPD, Beijing and the MDGs and meet their targets, particularly the target on achieving universal access to reproductive health by 2015, with special emphasis placed upon removing

the barriers that impede the access of girls to the fulfillment of this right;

- Strengthen HIV/AIDS programs through the inclusion of access to preventive confidential and youth friendly sexual and reproductive health services, treatment, support and care. Special emphasis should be placed upon human rights protection, as well as access to confidential, voluntary counseling and testing (VCT), while ensuring equitable and sustained access to information and treatment; and protection from violence, stigma, and discrimination and other human rights abuses, based on their serological status.
- Ensure that all girls have access to comprehensive sexuality education, in and out of school, based on scientific evidence, gender sensitive and within a human rights framework;
- Establish national data systems to collect sex and age disaggregated data that focuses on the form and prevalence of sexual violence against girls. These systems will enable comprehensive and regular monitoring, facilitate increased knowledge about incidence and prevalence patterns and enable governments to enact laws and policies to fully address the violence against women and girls. These programs should be accompanied by a strong empowerment component, specifically tailored to the needs of diverse girls and women, marginalized groups, and allocate the sufficient resources necessary to implement them.

This is your moment to make the difference in the lives of millions of girls who are victims of violence. We urge you to seize it.

**Aahung Pakistan; Action Aid USA; Advocates for Youth; AIDOS; Articulaci3n de Mujeres J3venes; Association for Women's Rights and Development; Astra Youth; Center for Reproductive Rights; Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies; Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights; CREA India; International Planned Parenthood Federation; International Women's Health Coalition; IPAS; Irish Family Planning Association; LUNDU; New Zealand Family Planning Association; Population and Sustainability Network; Population Action International; PromSex Peru; Women for Women's Human Rights-New Ways; Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights**

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