



THE WATCHDOG

Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women/ Feb 26th – March 9th 2007

<p>In this issue...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence and discrimination against the girl child: the importance of root causes. Alexandra Garita, IPPF/WHR. • Journée International du la Femme. Imane Khachani. Morocco. Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights. • Passing the Voice. Sara Coumans and Sille Jansen. The Netherlands. CHOICE • Statement to the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Coalition For Sexual And Bodily Rights In Muslim Societies • Joana Chagas. Brazil Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights 	<p>Violence and discrimination against the girl child: the importance of root causes.</p> <p>The 51st session of the Commission on the Status of Women's theme is the "Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl-child". Within these discussions are issues that relate to all forms of discrimination that girls face, including in the full enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights. In this context, it is important to consider that the term "girl child" as stipulated in international law includes references made throughout accorded language and that many women's rights documents embrace the rights of the girl-child, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. Furthermore, all of the human rights of women that have been stipulated in these documents must also fully apply to the girl-child, particularly in the context of discrimination and violence.</p> <p>The root causes of all forms of discrimination against women, and therefore girls, can be traced to distinctions made on the basis of sex from early childhood in families, schools, religious institutions, community spaces, sporting facilities, among others. There is a patriarchal view throughout the globe that men are "more productive", or are "more intelligent" or "stronger". Many of these values placed on boys rather than girls are the result of millenary views that have traditionally engaged the sexes in a struggle for power within the public sphere, where laws are enacted, public policies and programmes elaborated, and decisions are taken based on the assumption that women are not capable of undertaking these tasks because they were not raised for it. This all affects the manner in which girls are socialized, taught, educated, and reared. The CSW's theme this year has been important in that it seeks to advocate that states address the gender inequalities embedded in their cultures that result in harmful practices, violence and discrimination of girls and that this gender [in]justice has important consequences for States including decreased economic productivity, poverty, social harmony, peace, and stability.</p> <p>Hopefully, UN member states will adopt strong agreed upon language this week that will put an end to all forms of violence and discrimination against the girl child, particularly in relation to issues such as sexual and reproductive health, services, and information, comprehensive sexuality education, ensuring universal access to adequate health care, nutrition, and education for the girl-child, and the need for the protection of the girl-child in situations of physical, psychological, sexual, and mental violence. The human rights of girls must be fully realized if gender equality is to become a reality</p>
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Journée international du la femme

Que le chemin parcouru semble long depuis que Clara Zetkin, journaliste a la tête du *Die Gleichheit* et représentante du parti socialiste allemand proposa en 1907 l'idée d'une journée internationale célébrant la lutte des femmes pour leurs droits.

La célébration de cette journée ne fut cependant officialisée par les Nations Unies qu'en 1977, et chaque année les pays membres sont invités a dresser le bilan de la situation juridique, économique et sociale des femmes et a adopter sans plus tarder des mesures visant a instaurer l'égalité des genres et a éliminer toute forme de discrimination envers les femmes. Pourtant, et près de 90 ans après, la journée internationale des femmes reste d'une brûlante actualité; les femmes et les filles demeurant encore dans beaucoup de pays sujettes a de nombreuses discriminations et violations de leurs droits.

Ces violations commencent dans certaines sociétés par le refus du droit même à la vie, lorsque les familles décident d'interrompre la grossesse une fois que le sexe du fœtus est connu féminin. Elles se poursuivent après la naissance par le refus du droit a l'intégrité corporelle et ultérieurement a une vie sexuelle épanouie par la pratique de la mutilation des parties génitales des petites filles. A l'age des premiers cahiers, leur droit a la scolarisation est encore bien souvent bafoué, les seules perspectives d'avenir que leur réservent leurs familles étant le mariage. Et ce dernier est d'ailleurs encore forcé dans de nombreuses régions, et se fait souvent à un age bas, ce qui a de lourdes conséquences sur leur développement physique et psychosocial.

Partout au monde, que ce soit sur le plan juridique, économique ou social, les femmes continuent à souffrir de discrimination. Certes, l'ampleur des inégalités diffère d'un pays a l'autre et d'une société a l'autre mais malgré des décennies de travail de sensibilisation et d'efforts soutenus de plaidoyer, l'égalité des genres semble encore un lourd défi a relever dans la plupart des pays. Pour cela, prendre conscience que les rôles socialement construits imposés aux filles et aux femmes avant même leur naissance les empêchent de développer tous leurs potentiels, renforcer leur rôle en tant qu'acteurs efficaces du développement et favoriser l'égalité des chances est la seule manière de construire une société plus démocratique et plus juste. Plus que jamais, les femmes et les filles de part le monde ont besoin que l'on lève le voile sur les discriminations dont elles souffrent, que l'on fasse la lumière sur leurs problèmes et que l'on exprime leurs angoisses, dans l'espoir que la reconnaissance amène l'action, et que de l'action émergent des sociétés justes et égalitaires.

Imane Khachani

Morocco

Passing the Voice

The participation of youth in all decisions that affect them is crucial. Firstly youth should participate because they are stakeholders in these decisions. Ownership by youth of policies and decisions affecting them will make those policies and decisions more effective. Secondly, actively participating youth ensures that their voice that shapes their future is heard. Young people under 25 make up more than half of the world population. Their voice must be heard. Old people cannot decide on our future. It is the right of young people to participate; this has been confirmed by the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Young people are in the possession of a unique expertise and can use their own experience with regard to their own sexual and reproductive circumstances.

Young people can also inspire other young people and be role models to bring about behaviour change now and in the future. If we look at major issues dealt with at this CSW we see that youth participation is valuable to resolve problems in all areas: Discrimination and Violence against the girl child, HIV/AIDS, FGM and so on. These problems cannot be solved without the participation of youth. If we want to make a change for the future, young people have to participate today.

Young people can also bring in topics that are important to them, which are now easily disregarded. One of those topics is sexual and reproductive rights. These rights are essential to young people. Young people have the right to access to contraceptives and health care. They have the right to information and access to information. They have the right to comprehensive sexuality education. At this CSW many of the issues of high importance to young people remain untouched. This is detrimental to the outcome of this conference since issues which are of utmost importance to young people are not included in the Agreed Conclusions. This directly harms all girls, girls for whom these Conclusions have supposedly been drafted.

In the CSW this year, an important paragraph on youth participation has, however, been introduced, specifically on the participation of girls. The importance of participation of girls in the decision making process is reflected in paragraph 16. The effort of the Commission to introduce language on this subject should be applauded in order to guarantee the participation of girls in the future.

It is the task of the States to implement this paragraph to its full extent and to ensure that girls have access to the decision making processes and participate in it. This responsibility stretches from the local, national, regional to the international level. States should ensure access to education and information and encourage girls to use this information to empower themselves so they have the opportunity to stand up for their rights. Once given the opportunity, young people can decide independently and individually to what extent they will participate.

NGOs are similarly responsible for implementing the abovementioned paragraph. Especially those NGOs working on behalf of young people or those claiming to represent young people's interests. The overwhelming amount of grey haired people at this conference is both shocking and appalling. Especially because this CSW is on discrimination and violence against girls, whereas those girls, trying to work on sustainable solutions and participating at the CSW, are outside in a tent. Apparently not even the UN is immune to discrimination against girls.

Next year we hope to see many more young people and youth representatives in government delegations and as NGO representatives. Young people have creative solutions, going to the core of the problem, and most importantly young people want to raise their voices to change the world into a better place for all. Now and in the future.

Give young people a choice to raise their voice!

Sara Coumans and Sille Jansen for CHOICE
www.choiceforyouth.org

COALITION FOR SEXUAL AND BODILY RIGHTS IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES

Statement to the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

We are a coalition of more than fifty NGOs and academics from fifteen countries in the Middle East, North Africa and South and South East Asia who have come together to promote and defend sexual, bodily and reproductive rights as human rights since 2001. We welcome the meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women as a great opportunity to accelerate efforts for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against girls.

We call on all states to use this opportunity to commit to taking all measures to prevent, criminalize, prosecute and punish cases of all forms of physical, sexual, psychological and emotional violence against girls, including corporal punishment, female genital mutilation, crimes committed in the name of honor, rape, sexual exploitation, early marriages, forced marriages and forced pregnancy. These and other forms of violence must be recognized as human rights violations, whether they are committed within or outside the family.

We also urge states to step up their efforts towards ensuring gender equality and universal access to education by all children, with a view to changing gender stereotypes and prejudices, achieving equal treatment and opportunities, and encouraging the development and exercise of leadership by girls.

Governments must also ensure universal access to comprehensive sexuality education as a prerequisite for

the full development of personality, sexual wellbeing and quality of life in order to help young people mature into sexually healthy and responsible adults. We strongly believe that a multidimensional perspective of sexuality education, addressing biological, psychological, human and socio-cultural dimensions of sexuality, is essential to help young people develop a more comprehensive understanding of their bodies, their relationships with other people, and their relationship with their community and society.

Girls in situations that make them more at risk of human rights abuses are entitled to particular attention from the global community, including situations of poverty, migration and armed conflict.

The growing poverty and the negative impacts of economic globalization that sustains it are increasingly creating an environment non-conducive to the protection of the human rights of girls. Moreover, migrant women and girls continue to face multiple forms of discrimination and abuse, especially as our two regions continue to be a major source and recipient of migrant populations. Finally, foreign occupation, wars and the threats of military interventions not only invite abuse of the rights of girls and women, but also contribute to the increasing militarization, especially in the Middle East, creating severe impediments to the development and empowerment of girls and women.

We call on all states to ensure that all the previous commitments for the protection of the human rights of girls and women, as well as the Agreed Conclusions issued at the end of this meeting will be translated into actions and effectively implemented to put an end to the systematic violations of the human rights of girls.

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How beautiful could a being be?

In the past couple of months, two young Brazilian models died of anorexia and gained visibility in the news throughout the world. Many other cases are still invisible, keeping in secret one of the most violent form of imposition of gender stereotypes of our time: beauty.

Eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, are a symptom of a society that overvalues beauty and perfection, whatever they mean. Beauty and perfection are historical, culturally and socially constructed concepts; meaning that what is considered to be beautiful in Brazil is certainly different from what is considered beautiful in other countries. Similarly, it changes over the time.

Brazil is a country known for its 'beautiful', 'sexy' women. We walk around the streets of foreign countries as if we carried a label 'we are sexy' on our foreheads. Many adolescents and young Brazilian women are super models. They are, too, high-valued in the market for trafficking for sexual exploitation. Foreigners come to our

country for sex tourism. The Brazilian '*mulata*' (perfect body, nice curves, glowing skin colour, dancing samba) inhabits the fantasies of foreigners. But Brazilian women are just women, women in their diversity, black, white, indigenous, short, tall, skinny, fat and all possibilities in between.

What does this have to do with anorexia? Well, imagine this situation: you grow up in a society that tells you that to be loved, you have to be beautiful and sexy; and to be beautiful and sexy, you have to be skinny. The message is everywhere: in songs, in the literature, in fairy tales, in the toys we play with, in the magazines, in the soap operas, in the movies, in the television adds, I could go on for pages... Those that do not fit this beauty stereotype will not be loved. The solution is on the cover of fitness magazines: starve or have a plastic surgery. The number of adolescent and young women starving and having plastic surgery in Brazil is outrageous.

Eating disorders happen more frequently among women, and more so among adolescent and young women. Women's bodies have been traditionally controlled through numerous cultural and social practices, some more harmful than others. Virginity, chastity, marriage and motherhood are among the most accepted ones; veiling, female genital cutting/mutilation, and violence against women are more controversial. Most of them take place during childhood, adolescence and youth.

Beauty stereotypes are just another form of controlling women's bodies. They contribute to the sexualization and objectification of women, based on the idea that women's bodies exist to satisfy men's sexual desires. Kinda schizophrenic, isn't it? We are supposed to be pure and chaste AND we are supposed to be pretty and sexy; all for men. What about us? What about how we feel? How about just live us alone and let us be comfortable with our bodies and feeling beautiful for what we are?

The Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) requires States Parties to "modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women" (article 5a). The sexualization and objectification of women contribute to discrimination and violence against adolescent and young women's. States have a legal obligation to take measures to eliminate this violation of women's human rights.

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Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

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