



In This Issue

Reflections on the Review of A World Fit for Children

Comprehensive sexuality education and health services for adolescents: a need, a must!

20,000 girls at risk of FGM in the UK

Speech presented at "Ensuring Children's Health and Human Rights"

Una violencia sexual mas en el ciberespacio

The language that is missing



youth coalition

For more information:

www.youthcoalition.org

admin@youthcoalition.org

A World Fit for Children... still a long time away

These last two days the official five-year review of the World Fit for Children has been taking place at the United Nations. Whether it actually is a *review*, though, is debatable. Indeed, while governments have focused on highlighting areas of progress, challenges appear less clearly.

It is true that some things have improved, some progress had been made. But, is the task done? Have we created a world fit for children? Anyone and everybody would answer, "no". We still have a long way to go. Should we then, not focus on the challenges? For example, the fact the girls access to education continues to be unequal to those of boys; the fact that comprehensive sexuality education is absent from a large number of country policies and programmes; the fact that children and adolescents tend to be denied access to comprehensive health services. While education has been mentioned in this meeting, these two other issues have simply been ignored. As have many other issues that must be addressed to truly uphold the commitments that governments have made.

All in all, it must be said that this has been a disappointing process. In addition to the many issues that have been left off the table, one must note the barriers that civil society, including young people, have faced in this process. How, one may ask, can civil society be expected to participate, when the declaration is said to be "closed" before the official meeting even starts? A World Fit for Children recognizes the value of children, including adolescents' participation. Unfortunately, it appears that the review process does not.



Reflections on the Review of A World Fit for Children

By Samuel Kissi, Ghana, member of the Youth Coalition

One bright afternoon in the year 2000, I sat in a local transport bus, usually called “trotro” in Accra on my way home from school. Anyone familiar with this city and its transport system will attest to the sometimes noisy radio stations you are forced to listen to based on the driver’s preference. On this particular occasion, the news was on; and what I heard greatly surprised me. After the announcements of all the tragedies that usually accompany major news bulletins, there was another story most of the other passengers found incredibly humorous - I did not. The country was embarking on a national population census and this piece of news said that some women, mainly from the north of the country were not speaking to the census officials because their husbands have not given them the authority to get counted. In this news item, this was being presented as one of the challenges that the census operation was facing.

It took my mind back to the same issue of empowerment that I had heard so many people talk about time and again. I could not help but agree that most of these abuses and disparities in development exist because the victims do not even know that it is their right and that an injustice is being committed against them. Most of the problems faced by developing countries today, economic or social, can be directly attributed to the denial of children’s rights. My country boasts of many first achievements; one is that, we were the first country in Sub Saharan Africa to gain independence. Another is that we were the first to ratify the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, CRC. Currently, all countries in Africa but Somalia have ratified this convention.

Together with other countries, 27 goals were adopted by the World’s Leaders at the World Summit for Children in 1990. The Special Session for children in 2002 presented another opportunity for countries and their leaders to re-affirm their commitment to children. At each of these events and within every set of goals and targets were all the cardinals that are needed to create a world fit for children. It is interesting how some of these, like ensuring the right to education, opinion, choice, and health have a deep reaching effect on the sexual and reproductive health of children and later as adults.

In the build-up to the Special Session, Nelson Mandela and his wife Graca Machel had led the *Say Yes for Children Campaign* which **emphasized what they called the ten critical actions:**

- Putting Children First
- Leave no child out
- Educate every child
- Eradicate poverty, invest in children
- Combat HIV/AIDS
- Protect the earth for children
- Protect children from war
- Protect children from harm and exploitation
- Listen to children and ensure their participation
- Care for every child

Five years on, it is time again to review the commitments that were made and to find ways of moving forward the agenda of children. In Ghana, and most places in the developing world, it is still difficult for children, especially younger adolescents to access sexual and reproductive health information and services.

In the children 's statement at the 2002 UNGASS on Children, they said that they imagine a world in which among other things there was an end to exploitation, abuse and violence; the eradication of HIV/AIDS and provision of health care, education and the vicious cycle of poverty.

During this review, it is important to take cognizance of all these push factors that could jeopardize and compromise the chances of children having a world in which they can grow to realize their full potential. Although various strides have been made at various levels, we still need to accelerate our pace if we will meet our set targets.

At the international level, we need to acknowledge the problems and challenges we are faced with and find pragmatic ways of dealing with them. Restrictions on children 's rights which make it difficult and sometimes impossible for them to have free access to information as in article 17 of the CRC and to share their thoughts as active participants in decisions that affect them. We can end most of the societal tragedies we have today just by teaching and empowering the children about their rights and recognizing them as rights bearers capable of making informed decisions. It is only when children have the opportunity to realize their full potential that the nations in which they live can do same. We know the right things to do; we just need the political will to make a change. Let this review not be just another opportunity for 're-affirmation ' but a call to action!



Comprehensive sexuality education and health services for adolescents: a need, a must!

By Imane Khachani, MD

Youth Coalition member, Morocco

According to the United Nations, adolescence is “**the stage of life during which individuals reaches sexual maturity**” (1997). It’s a period of transition from childhood to adulthood during which adolescents form their gender attitudes and behaviors, explore and develop their sexuality and learn about human relationships. They experience physical and mental changes that have important implications for their current and future health, particularly their sexual and reproductive health.

However, due to strong social and cultural taboos surrounding sexuality, adolescents are often left in the dark about their bodies and their physical development. Their specific sexual and reproductive health needs - that vary from those of adults in important ways - remain poorly understood and under-served in much of the world and comprehensive sexuality education - which means sexuality education that doesn’t only promote abstinence but gives adolescents all the necessary information to make responsible and healthy choices - is often banned, as mistakenly considered as a way to encourage promiscuity.

The fact is, evidence has shown that if adolescents are left without the necessary information, education and service provision to make them knowledgeable about their sexuality and reproduction and promote healthy and responsible sexual and reproductive behavior, adolescence might become a period often characterized by sexual and reproductive risk-taking, putting adolescents at risk of early and unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Based on over 15 years of research, the American Psychological Association has released in 2005 a report that highlights the importance of comprehensive sexuality education programs to reduce HIV-risk behavior and delay the onset of sexual intercourse. “Both comprehensive sexuality education and abstinence only programs delay the onset of sexual activity. However, only comprehensive sexuality education is effective in protecting adolescents from pregnancy and sexually transmitted illnesses at first intercourse and during later sexual activity. In contrast, scientifically sound studies of abstinence only programs show an unintended consequence of unprotected sex at first intercourse and during later sexual activity. In this way, abstinence only programs increase the risk of these adolescents for pregnancy and sexually transmitted illnesses, including HIV/AIDS,” said psychologist Maureen Lyon, Ph.D., Chair of the committee that produced the report*.

Neglecting adolescents’ specific needs has major negative implications for their future, since sexual and reproductive behaviours during adolescence have far reaching consequences for people’s lives as they develop into adulthood. However, investing in adolescents’ health through comprehensive, gender-sensitive and age-specific interventions constitutes an important strategy to ensure the future generation has a healthy and risk-less sexual and reproductive life that relies on accurate and comprehensive information, and confidential, accessible youth friendly services provision.



20,000 girls at risk of FGM in the UK

By Mary Claire Price

FORWARD UK

In October 2007, FORWARD published 'A Statistical Study to Estimate the Prevalence of Female Genital Mutilation in England and Wales'. The study revealed that over 20,000 girls could be at risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the UK.

Funded by the Department of Health and in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Department of Midwifery, City University, the study reveals that nearly 66,000 women with FGM are living in England and Wales (2001) and that there are nearly 16,000 girls under the age of 15 at high risk of WHO Type III FGM and over 5,000 at high risk of WHO Type I or Type II.

Efua Dorkenoo, OBE, the Principal Investigator of the study, said "The United Nations has recognised female genital mutilation (FGM) as a human rights violation and the practice is prohibited in the UK under the FGM Act (2003), Children Act and other legislations. Yet lack of reliable data on FGM prevalence has until now marginalised the issue. This study represents a major first step to fill the gap in available data on FGM. The estimates of FGM provided in this study highlight the need not only to enhance health care for girls and adult women who have already undergone FGM but calls for systematic actions to prevent FGM being passed on to the younger generation."

Baroness Joyce Gould, FORWARD patron said "This study suggests that the practice is on the increase. It is hoped that the results of the study will support the planning and implementation of a comprehensive national strategy in the UK that will help to expedite efforts to end FGM within a generation."

The Department of Health's response to the study states that "The Department is pleased to have supported and funded this important study that continues to profile FGM issues, a key objective of which is bringing an understanding to practising communities that such mutilation is unacceptable".

The findings of the study highlight the urgent need for greater partnership work between the statutory agencies, third sector organisations and practising communities



Speech presented at “ Ensuring Children ’ s Health and Human Rights”

By Laura Villa Torres

Ipas, and member of the Youth Coalition, Mexico

The day before yesterday, I received a phone call from a dear friend in Mexico City. She teaches history in a private junior high school, and she was facing a difficult situation. Someone at the school had found pictures of a young adolescent boy of 12, wearing female clothes. The directors of the school decided to expel him with the excuse that those behaviors were risky for the institution ’ s reputation and for the rest of the students, and even when their parents tried to stop this, they were threatened with not receiving a letter of recommendation for their child to attend another school.

On the other hand, at this morning ’ s High Level Plenary Meeting we heard a young boy from Namibia about the same age, with a very well prepared speech... instead of talking about the plays he likes, the things that worry him, the reality of the other children in their country, he was speaking about the targets to achieve, the progress that has been made, the challenges that children face. The other children next to me were totally bored and falling sleep. Who was he suppose to be talking to and on behalf of whom? A speech totally removed from a childhood perspective. And that was going through my mind was this boy from Mexico City.

For the past few days, I ’ v e been thinking about what to talk about here today. The question I was asked to answer is why children have rights (and which are the barriers to exercise them) . That is a difficult question because it has a very logical answer for me: children, as human beings, are entitled to all human rights. Why are there then so many challenging situations when we talk about the fulfillment of children ’ s rights?

First, we think they children are inferior so we have to make decisions on their behalf. But we also think that from the moment they are born till the day before their 18th birthday they live in a sort of bubble. The reality is totally different. We do not recognize that children have sexuality since they are born, and it includes the way in which they relate to one another. Social institutions, such as schools, churches, families-, frequently limit the ability of children to make decisions related to their sexuality and reproductive life in safe and respectful settings.

Furthermore, the reality shows us that girls and boys begin their reproductive capacity at the early ages of 9 or 10. And we are not prepared to talk about this. We are even afraid. As a result we have children and adolescents living with HIV, adolescent girls are getting pregnant, they face unsafe abortions, sexual violence, discrimination due to sexual orientation, lack of access to comprehensive sexuality education, and lack of access to youth friendly health services.

We are here now because we are organizations and activists that work to achieve the fulfillment of the SRR for all, including of children and adolescents. We are concerned that today in order to not to open the discussion more, the governments have decided not to talk about these issues. We might also say, however, that children and adolescents face particular challenges not only because of their age, but because they are living in situations of conflict, displacement, poverty, and forced migration; Their SRR are totally overlooked even though they are being highly violated.

We also need to rethink the concept of citizenship. Is not simply reduced to the age and the right to vote and be elected. From the time they are born, children are entitled to the protection of all rights, and as they grow up they begin to exercise

them according to their evolving capacities and life experiences. For example, adolescents begin their sexual life around 14 years old, and in many countries they don't have comprehensive sexuality education, they need prescriptions to get contraceptives, and parental consent to receive health care. We can't wait until they are 18 to provide them with these fundamental needs.

Girls and adolescents women experience particular gender based discrimination and violence. There is still a lot of work to do to achieve the gender equality in all aspects of life and this must be considered in all strategies to promote, protect, and fulfill children's rights.

If we stand on the best interest of the children and adolescents, and we recognize their evolving capacities, we need to recognize them as sexual beings, and guarantee their access to the services and education processes they need in order for them to live their sexual lives and reproductive capacity safely and respectfully. It is needed to empower children and adolescents, promote and raise awareness about their rights in a friendly way, and we need to make sure to open spaces where they can exercise their meaningful participation. We need to reinforce the institutions at a local level with human and material resources to respond to children's needs and human rights violations they face, including their sexual and reproductive rights.

Now governments have the opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and they must act on it. This Convention is the instrument that imparts legal obligations on states to ensure the fulfillment of children rights and they must step up to implement them.



Una violencia sexual mas en el ciberespacio

By Ariel Gonzalez Galeano, member of the Youth Coalition, Paraguay

Meses atrás, Paraguay fue escenario de un caso muy comentado en casi todo el país, mediante los noticieros e informativos de la televisión: un niño de 11 años fue víctima de de sus propios amigos/as en la internet.

A pesar de que solo el 2% de la población paraguaya tiene acceso a internet, este caso atrajo la atención de gran cantidad de la población. Y lo principalmente anunciado era: La rápida expansión del número de usuarios de comunidades virtuales acaparó incluso a los niños y adolescentes pero para fines sexuales.

Este niño, levanto un perfil suyo en una determinada comunidad virtual, donde además de completar sus datos personales, también agrego fotografías. Sus compañeros/as, luego de haber tenido una riña con el en la escuela, a modo de venganza, crearon un perfil en la misma comunidad, con los mismos datos, mismas fotografías y otras más de carácter pornográfico. En los datos, hicieron alusión a que su compañero era homosexual y que pedía que homosexuales adultos lo contacten para iniciarlo sexualmente. Además, invitaban a sus compañeros de colegio a que visiten el perfil creado y que insulten a su compañero en este sitio web, por su preferencia sexual.

Incluso la Fiscalía tomó cartas en el asunto, fue tanto el alboroto armado, que el niño en cuestión dejo de ir a la escuela por unos días. Además nuevamente la comunidad GLTBQ fue comentada como lo peor y mayor causa de depravación de la sociedad. Internet fue visto como un problema social.

Definitivamente se violaron muchos derechos del niño afectado, no solo por sus propios compañeros sino también por los medios de comunicación. Y mas allá de solidarizarme con el afectado, deseaba manifestar que a pesar de que una violencia sexual más ha ocurrido en el ciberespacio, ni internet ni la cuestión de preferencias sexuales son las causantes de comportamientos violentos: nosotros/as mismos/as, miembros/as de la sociedad nos encargamos de enseñar con el ejemplo, comportamientos discriminatorios y usar a la sexualidad como un aspecto sucio y negativo de la conducta humana.

Debemos entonces, promover, facilitar y exigir una educación para la sexualidad desde edades más tempranas y no solo para población joven o adulta. El acceso a una educación sexual integral es un derecho sexual y reproductivo fundamental, que no solo prevendrá casos de violencia sexual en el ciberespacio, sino que ayudara a generar comportamientos mas sanos y responsables de la población toda y hacer posible el ejercicio pleno y sin discriminación de una sexualidad placentera



The language that is missing –introduction to an alternative declaration

By Eelke Bakker, member CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, The Netherlands

Over 1,2 billion children are entering their reproductive years. Approximately 2 million children aged 5-15 are trafficked at the commercial sex market. Pregnancy is the number one cause of death among girls between 15 and 19 years old. Two thirds of all new HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa happen among girls aged 15 to 19 years.

According to youth leaders from around the globe, the proposed declaration for WFFC+5 fails to address the most pressing issues that affect children and adolescents. Issues like gender equality, comprehensive sexuality education, and meaningful youth participation are missing in the document and there is poor language on girls' specific needs. So youth leaders felt the need to "help out" governments in improving the current declaration and making it reflect their issues and concerns. Their proposed declaration was sent out through the International Sexual and Reproductive Rights coalition list-serve and immediately endorsed by over 30 international organizations.

During an advocacy training, organized by IWHC, prior to the WFFC+5, 17 young women from all around the world started working on a more appropriate and accurate declaration that would address urgent issues like the increasing number of young people getting infected by HIV, the feminization of the HIV epidemic, the lack of access to comprehensive sexuality education and health services and information. These issues are of utmost importance to achieve the goals set out in the CRC and WFFC Plan of Action as well as previous documents like ICPD, Beijing and CEDAW. Later during the week other youth activists and representatives of the SRHR movement joined the rewording process.

Children and adolescents are human beings and therefore all human rights apply equally to them, including sexual and reproductive rights. Giving them the information and skills to make informed and responsible choices is necessary to ensure the full exercise of these rights and to prevent the currently prevailing problems.

Let us ensure a world in which both girls and boys have a safe space to play, learn, love and enjoy their right to grow up in an empowering environment.



Proposed Draft Declaration of the Commemorative High Level Plenary Meeting devoted to the follow-up to the outcome of the Special Session on Children

International Sexual and Reproductive Rights Coalition

1. We, the representatives of States gathered at the commemorative high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly, are encouraged by the success the progress made since 2002 in creating a world fit for children. Fewer children under five are dying each year. More children are in school than ever before. More educational opportunities are being equally extended to girls and boys, **though still unequally**. More medicines are available for children; especially those infected affected by HIV/AIDS, **though not enough to serve all children's needs**. More laws are in place to protect children from violence, abuse and exploitation. Our present and future actions should build upon **these important gains while further addressing** the specific needs of girls and adolescents.

2. **Many challenges persist. Poverty; gender inequality; all forms of discrimination against the girl child; abuse; traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children; armed conflicts; HIV and AIDS; limited access to comprehensive health services, information and education; continue to remain critical challenges in protecting and promoting the rights and well-being of all children**, particularly in developing countries. Despite encouraging achievements, the number of children dying before their fifth birthday is disquieting remains unacceptably high. Malnutrition, pandemics, including HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and preventable diseases continue to be a hindrance to a healthy life for millions of children. Lack of access to **quality education, particularly for girls, and inadequate and/or insufficient access to comprehensive sexuality education**, remain significant obstacles to their **well-being and development**. Children are still subject to **all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse, preventable diseases and other conditions affecting their health. They also face inequality and discrimination, due to the lack of protective policies and/or mechanisms ensuring that these policies are implemented**. We **pledge** will work to break the cycle of poverty, achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals **by 2015**, and **ensure** the realization of all rights of **all** the children.
(ICDP Paragraph 7.Point 4.6; Beijing Platform of Action 107; CEDAW Article 10; CRC Articles 19 and 24)

3. **We reaffirm the obligations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and express** our commitment to the full implementation of the Declaration and the Plan of Action contained in "A world fit for Children", recognizing that their implementation and the fulfillment of **these and** the obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and **of** other relevant international instruments, **such as the ICPD Program of Action**, are mutually reinforcing in protecting the rights and promoting the well-being of children. In all our actions, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
(CRC Article 3)

4. **A committed**, scaled-up and cross-sectorial response by Governments, increased international cooperation and broader and more focused partnerships, including with the mass media and the private sector, and global, regional and national initiatives are critical to achieve the goals of the special session on children. We reaffirm our determination to pursue **achieve** the agreed global targets and to **implement actions** for mobilizing resources for children, **including adolescents**, in accordance with "A World Fit for Children", **especially enhanced debt relief, non-discriminatory trading and increased access to new technologies**.
(MDG 8)

5. **As we welcome the voices and views of children and adolescents heard at the commemorative plenary meeting, we pledge to implement and strengthen their representative and meaningful participation** in the decisions that affect them, in accordance with their age and maturity **evolving capacities**. We envisage a world in which boys and girls are provided with a **safe space to play, learn, love and enjoy their right to grow up in an empowering environment**.
(CRC Articles 5, 12, 13)

6. **Girls are still subject to all forms of discrimination and violence. Harmful traditional customary practices; armed conflict; the increasing feminization of the HIV/AIDS epidemic; the lack of access to education, to a safe learning environment, and to safe and comprehensive health services; and the denial of their right to make informed decisions continue to limit their potential for full development and empowerment. We recognize the urgency in addressing these needs and pledge to undertake concrete actions to eliminate all of the above stated violations of the rights of girls, in line with the World Fit for Children.**

7. **We renew our political will commitment** to intensify our efforts towards building a world fit for children. We are confident that our **targets** collective aspirations will be realized if all relevant actors; **governments, civil society, and children and adolescents themselves** are united for children. All our policies and programs should promote the shared responsibility of **policy makers**, parents, families, legal guardians and other care givers, and society as a whole in this regard. By giving high priority to the rights of children, to their survival and to their protection and development, we serve the best interests of all humanity. In solidarity We will pursue **achieve** our common vision of ensuring the well-being of all children in all societies, with a collective sense of urgency.

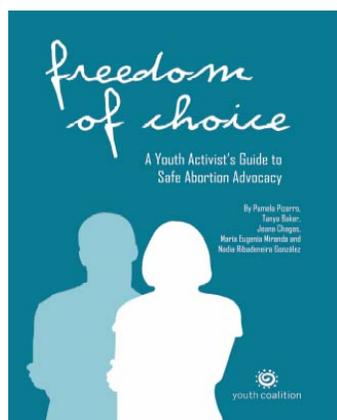
New York, 12 December, 2007

**Aahung, Pakistan
Action Canada for Population and Development, Canada**

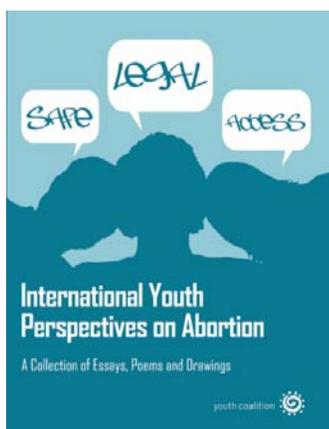
Advocates for Youth Philippines Foundation
 Asia Pacific Alliance/ICPD
 ASTRA Youth
 Choice Ireland
 Choice for Youth and Sexuality, The Netherlands
 Danish Family Planning Association
 Domestic Violence Incest Resource Center, Australia
 Estudio para la Defensa y los Derechos de la Mujer, Peru
 Family Care International
 FEIM, Argentina
 FORWARD-UK
 The Initiative of Change, Indonesia
 International Women's Health Coalition, USA
 International Planned Parenthood Federation
 Inter-American Parliamentary Group on Population and Development
 Ipas
 Latin American Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights
 The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, New York City, USA
 The Positive Movement, Indonesia
 Red Nacional de Adolescentes en Salud Sexual y Reproductiva, Argentina
 Spanish Federation of Family Planning
 Students Partnership Worldwide, Zambia
 YouAct, European Youth Network on Sexual and Reproductive Rights
 Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Chile, Mexico, Morocco
 World Population Foundation, The Netherlands

The articles in this newsletter represent the views of the authors and not of the Youth Coalition.

Our latest Publications:



Freedom of Choice: A Youth Activist's Guide to Safe Abortion Advocacy



International Youth Perspectives on Abortion



youth coalition

CONTACT US!

www.youthcoalition.org
admin@youthcoalition.org

**405-260 Dalhousie Street
 Ottawa, ON K1N 7E4
 TEL +613 562-3522
 FAX +613-562-9502**