



THE WATCHDOG

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U.S. Fails Young Women Again

Youth for Women’s Rights Caucus

Wednesday March 2 ended the third day of official proceedings of the 49th session of the CSW. In the official plenary session, governments from around the world have made strong and progressive statements restating their commitment to women’s health and human rights. The statement by the United States was a sad exception: they failed to reaffirm the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd General Assembly Special Session. Given the importance of Beijing for the lives, hopes and dreams of women everywhere, this is unconscionable.



Youth for Women’s Rights Caucus Side Event

While other governments talked about what they were doing to improve the status of young women in their own country, the U.S. focused on their foreign policy, much of which harms young women’s health and violates their human rights.

Far from a success, the under-funded President’s Emergency Plan for HIV/AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is putting the lives and health of millions of young women at risk. It mandates that one-third of funding for prevention activities go to abstinence-only sex education programs. These are programs that do not teach young women how to enjoy their sexuality safely, but rather stress the dangers of it. These programs do not talk about contraceptives, including male and female condoms, and how to use them properly, but only stress the risks of contraceptive failure. As a result, these programs do not respond to the realities of young women’s lives and they do not give them the knowledge or skills to negotiate sex on their terms or protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmissible infections, including HIV/AIDS. As young women and men, we know that abstinence-only programs don’t work and that abstinence-until-marriage vows are easier to break than condoms.

If the U.S. was serious about stemming the HIV pandemic, they would promote young people’s access to nonjudgmental comprehensive sexuality education that is not heterosexist and that respects young people’s sexuality, identities and experiences. They would promote and fund young people’s access to youth-friendly, confidential and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and counseling, including safe abortion services. They would ensure that young people had easy, affordable access to a consistent supply of male and female condoms. They would place more emphasis on addressing the underlying factors that increase young women’s vulnerability to HIV infection, including poverty and discrimination. AND they would start doing this at home, as well as abroad.

Youth Summit: Knowledge is Power

By Thirza Bronner, the Netherlands

The growing debate on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for young people all around the world is one in which the voices of young people are seldom heard. We are not consulted



to talk about our concerns and think about possible solutions, although these issues affect us the most.

Fortunately, a step has been taken to change this situation. A trans-Atlantic dialogue on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights has been

held on the 15th and 16th of February in Brussels, Belgium. 50 youth advocates from all over the European Union and the United States, between the ages of 18-25, talked about our experiences with SRHR issues, exchanged ideas, compared differences in the situation and shared best practices; but foremost made a Plan of Action! In this plan of action we call upon all leaders involved in this issue, local as well as at a national or international level, to start communicating with youth and to see us as part of the solution and a valuable resource to fight all problems.

Young people know best what our concerns are and what we need to take care of. For example, a participant from the US said: "My

sexuality education was no good. I have a one-year old son and still need to finish my high school. I love my son, but I would have liked it to be the other way around. First a diploma and then a son, but I had no knowledge." A participant from Poland said: "My doctor refused to prescribe the pill to me. How can I act responsibly and make good choices when my rights are ignored?" To overcome these problems we identified three main areas that need special attention and will guarantee not only the rights of young people, but also the chance to lead a fulfilling life and be a productive member of society.

1. First of all, we need comprehensive sexuality education; without information, young people cannot make responsible choices!
2. Second, we need access to all sexual health services and supplies, which are youth friendly. Without good access young people cannot protect ourselves against STIs and STDs, including HIV or unwanted pregnancies. Good access is life saving!
3. Thirdly, renewed attention is needed for the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, as young people are its primary victims. We need a chance to protect ourselves or to get proper treatment so everyone can still be a valuable member of society.

The conference was organized by SIECUS, Advocates for Youth, Marie Stopes International and YouAct. For further information please contact: marije.nederveen@mariestopes-org.be

Quotes are anonymous due to privacy reasons.

The African Caucus

By Wala Nulungwe, Zambia

The African Caucus is an interesting mix of African women and men. It is a united civil society force interested in pushing women's issues forward. In this regard, the Caucus was concerned about the fact that almost all the African government reports excluded the issue of resource mobilization for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Added to this apprehension was the fact that most of the programmes designed on the basis of the Beijing Platform were not implemented due to lack of funding.

Another concern was that the government reports gave the impression that all was well in Africa concerning gender equality, yet there is a lot that remains to be done in order for the Beijing Platform of Action to be fully implemented. The Caucus resolved to issue a communiqué to show that most governments did not have consultations with civil society before preparing the reports. It is hoped that governments will get input from civil society when preparing the reports.

Eyes and Ears – Day 1

By Maiden Manzanal, the Philippines



Melissa Gabriel and Elina Juntunen listen intently

“Guarantee Sexual and Reproductive Rights For All!”

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan struck the right chord in asking: “How can we achieve gender equality when half a million women die of pregnancy-related causes every year from causes that are entirely preventable?” Guaranteeing Sexual and Reproductive Rights is central to the achievement of gender equality.

We applaud the strong support of the Secretary General in Sexual and Reproductive Rights of women and girls. Ten years after Beijing, the governments have to deliver concrete results in this area as he even noted, ‘the terrifying growth of HIV and AIDS, especially in young women, and pervasive violence against women and girls.’ These have been growing at very alarming rates in all regions of the world.

We also congratulate the Danish Minister for an unequivocal progressive position of Sexual and Reproductive Rights of women, as this is a precondition of sustainable development. “Violence against women and girls should be dealt with zero tolerance”, she said.

In this regard, we do not want to be drowned under the waves of rhetoric and the inundation of all the niceties and motherhood generalizations that governments have been saying. We want an urgent action, large scale enough to have impact, for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and all the other strategic areas recommended from the report of the Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality.

Participación de las mujeres jóvenes en CR

By Adriana Maroto and Lurys Marin

Desde hace algún tiempo, algunas mujeres jóvenes que trabajamos en derechos sexuales y reproductivos a nivel nacional, teníamos la inquietud de organizarnos y abrir espacios para discutir sobre nuestros intereses, necesidades y particularidades como mujeres jóvenes.

A mediados del mes de febrero, logramos iniciar un proceso, al reunirnos en el Taller de Advocacy “Los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las mujeres jóvenes en el marco de la Cuarta Conferencia Mundial sobre la Mujer y las Metas de Desarrollo del Milenio”, convocado por la Asociación Demográfica Costarricense, con el apoyo de IPPF/WHO.

Como resultado de esta actividad, redactamos un Pliego de Peticiones que entregamos a la delegación oficial de Costa Rica que está participando en la 49 Sesión de la Comisión del Estatus de la Mujer de las Naciones Unidas.

El Pliego de Peticiones inicia argumentando que “las más de 513.000 mujeres jóvenes que vivimos en Costa Rica, representamos la cuarta parte de las mujeres del país y un octavo de la población total. Actualmente existen condiciones específicas que nos afectan como la violencia, el poco acceso a una información adecuada sobre la sexualidad y servicios de salud poco adecuados para las especificidades de las mujeres jóvenes entre otros. Estas situaciones vulnerabilizan y acercan a las jóvenes a situaciones de mayor riesgo para su integridad física y emocional, aumentando las posibilidades de sufrir violencia sexual, embarazos no deseados, VIH / SIDA y otras Infecciones de Transmisión Sexual. Por lo anterior, se hace urgente que el gobierno de Costa Rica diseñe, elabore e implemente políticas públicas tendientes a combatir aquellas prácticas socioculturales que perpetúan y legitiman la vulnerabilización de las mujeres jóvenes y los derechos humanos de éstas.”

En el pliego de peticiones, planteamos nuestras demandas considerando dos áreas específicas, las cuales son:

- Participación de mujeres jóvenes en las instancias de toma de decisiones referentes a todos los aspectos que competen a nuestras vidas.
- Condiciones óptimas en los sistemas de educación y salud, que faciliten una salud sexual y reproductiva desde un enfoque integral en que se respeten los derechos humanos y las diversidades.

Para finalizar, el pliego de peticiones demanda al gobierno de Costa Rica, la ratificación de la declaración de Beijing y de su Plataforma de Acción sin ninguna reserva.

Este pliego, además de ser entregado a la Ministra de la Condición de la Mujer, fue presentado en una Conferencia de Prensa que tuvo una amplia cobertura por diversos medios de comunicación.

Lo más importante es que este pliego es sólo el primer paso, ya que estamos trabajando en la conformación de una red de mujeres jóvenes comprometidas con la defensa y promoción de los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las mujeres jóvenes en Costa Rica.

Eyes and Ears – Day 2

By Jostein Van Vliet, the Netherlands

In general, the presentations of the delegations focused on the economic and employment factors of women's rights. There was little focus on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, and even less on the rights of young women.

The plenary session in the General Assembly started with the statement from the European Union, delivered by the delegation of Luxembourg. The EU called for a complete reaffirmation of the Beijing and Beijing +5 documents, and they made a link to the CEDAW and its optional protocol and the MDGs. An important and strong point made during this contribution was that gender equality couldn't be achieved without the sexual and reproductive rights of women. However, they only mentioned young people in the context of women and girls; even though young women are a group that are physically, socially, psychologically and economically apart from women and girls.

Sweden made a very strong point on Sexual and Reproductive Rights as well. They stated that young people have a right to sexuality education, as well as a right to abortion. Young people need control over their body and their sexuality. A less positive point the Swedish Minister made was that prostitution is always violence against women; thus purporting a link between trafficking and prostitution. Brazil made a reference to Sexual and Reproductive Rights as well. They also said that they would review the penalties on abortion.

New Zealand strongly stressed the point that women die because they lack information. They also stated that they would not accept anything less than complete reaffirmation. The Netherlands were strong on the point of Sexual and Reproductive Rights and on the point of sexual orientation: they stated that women need control concerning their sexuality, and emphasised the point that the Millennium Development Goals cannot be realised if the Beijing Platform for Action is not fully implemented.

Eyes and Ears – Day 3

By Nompumelelo Mbatha, South Africa

The third day of the CSW saw the continuation of the governmental reports that started yesterday. It was a really great start to the day with Canada urging all governments to reaffirm their commitment and set their eyes and efforts on implementation. Sexual and Reproductive Health



Youth For Women's Rights discussing what they have heard

and Rights received special mention and were deemed important in the empowerment and development of women. Canada further urged governments to place issues of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and the Economic Empowerment of women at the forefront of all interventions.

What was very encouraging today was that all government reports presented reaffirmed their commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd Session on the Commission on the Status of Women. The challenge that was common within all governments was that of the escalating mortality rate caused by HIV and AIDS. They all noted that the HIV pandemic was a huge hindrance to the implementation of the Platform for Action.

Disappointingly, little mention was made about *Youth* Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. I fully applaud and stand behind governments who are committed to the Beijing Platform for Action and the empowerment and advancement of women. Like the Minister said, "Women deserve no less."

HIV/AIDS in Serbia and Montenegro

By Sanja Panjkovic and Jovana Kusic,
Serbia and Montenegro

In Serbia and Montenegro, as in many other countries, the nation is going through a transitional period. Politicians do not pay enough attention to the topics related to the sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially for youth. Because of this lack of interest on behalf of politicians, the situation in our country is really urgent.

In Serbia and Montenegro:

- Legislation in Serbia allows abortion, but the government has no time or will to organize activities related to the prevention of unwanted pregnancy. Everyday in Serbia between 200 and 300 abortions are performed. This is the number of abortions done in public medical institutions. Although it is great that abortion is legal in Serbia, it should not be used as a form of contraception
- Research done by ASTRA youth shows that the most used contraceptive method used in Serbia is the withdrawal method and is also the reason of that high rates of HIV/AIDS and STI exist.
- Although condom use among Serbian youth has increased there are young people who do not use condoms, or do not know how to use a condom properly
- Serbia is second in Southeastern Europe for high rates of HIV/AIDS
- In Serbia there is currently 1800 registered cases of HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that the actually rate of infection is up to 10 times higher.
- 60% of all HIV infections occur through sexual intercourse



In spite of all these facts, Serbia and Montenegro has a lot of potential and young people, together with the government, are ready to deal with these problems and find solutions. Young people believe that they have the power and strength to make Serbia and Montenegro a better

ABC Is Not Enough

By Elina Juntunen, Finland

A is for abstinence, B is for be faithful and C is for the correct use of condoms. But it often does not work for young women have no say, and no chance for self-determination even when it comes to their own bodies. Being faithful may work for women but not for men, and in sub-Saharan Africa, males have access, in average, to 4 condoms per year.

Young people between the ages of 15-24 account for half of all the new HIV infections worldwide. Young women and girls, particularly young married women, are the hardest hit by the infection. Experience has shown that ABC does not work. It was maybe meant as a simple approach to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, it is obviously very limited in its simplicity.

We, young people, need more than ABC. We should be aware of all the means available to be able to protect ourselves not only from HIV/AIDS, but also from unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexual exploitation and violence. This is also why HIV/AIDS prevention should not be separated from the context of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Rather, it should be addressed with a holistic approach: access to accurate and comprehensive sexuality education, youth-friendly services, affordable, good quality supplies and implementation and monitoring of the legislation that is needed.

We, young women and men, must be able to make free, informed and healthy choices during our whole sexual and reproductive lifetime. The choices that especially young women are able to make now will have long-lasting effects on their lives, their families, communities and societies at all sectors. Indeed our bodies, our health, our rights matter! Do not deny us our future.

FUNDAMENTALISM, a weapon of mass destruction versus CONDOM, a weapon of mass protection

By Elina Juntunen, Finland

The Abstinence-only-until-marriage approach can be very risky if young people fail in using abstinence. According to SIECUS, young people who took an abstinence pledge were one-third less likely to use contraception when they did become sexually active than their peers who had not pledged. Maybe one essential question is that do young people find it more difficult to abstain 100% of the (certain) time or to use condoms correctly 100% of the (certain) time. In many schools and programmes, abstinence is the only thing taught to young people. Religious and ideological reasons affect the level of knowledge that young people have when it comes to their sexuality and their health!

The abstinence-only approach is very contradictory with the rights-based approach as it clearly violates the right of young people to know and learn about their sexuality and sexual health and rights. How can young people protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and risky sexual behaviour if they are not aware of the methods of contraception and protection? As it has been said: it is a lot easier to break a promise than a condom.

For the record, in the U.S, regardless of whether young people have taken a virginity pledge, 88% of the consistent pledgers and 99% of non-pledgers will have sex before they marry. United States has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the industrialized world, meaning that nearly 900 000 teenage girls in the U.S. become pregnant each year. Eight in 10 of these pregnancies are unintended. Clearly, there is a lack of sexuality education!

Abstinence can not be the only method that is taught to young people. Sexuality is an indispensable part of human life. Young people should not have to fear their sexuality! They should be aware of their rights and empowered to exercise those rights. And now one might ask: what about the responsibilities? Yes, it is true, young people also have responsibilities. Having the rights does not mean young people are throwing away their responsibilities. Having the rights means also respecting the other people's rights. And having the rights also means that young people can take their responsibilities. No knowledge, no responsible behaviour.

Virginity pledge or abstinence-only-until-marriage programmes are likely harmful. One of these, called the Silver Ring Thing is a U.S. Christian-based program that is federally funded. It delivers religious message despite limits placed on the use of federal funds by the establishment of the First Amendment. President Bush has announced that funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programmes should double. The *U.S. Five-Year Global HIV/AIDS Strategy* (released February 2004) will provide \$133 million annually on abstinence-until-marriage programs in Africa and the Caribbean. Just imagine, in the countries that are severely hit by HIV/AIDS, abstinence is the only thing that is taught! However, it must be clarified that abstinence is also a good thing. But only when people know there are also other means of protection. They have the right to know and they have the right to choose.

Fundamentalism and narrow mindedness endanger the health of young people -especially attacking the lives of girls and women. Politics and political/religious reasons can no longer be the excuse to ignore the reality. Sexual rights and women's rights cannot be tyrannized just because the "all-powerful" Bush and Vatican, and other fundamentalists want to do so!

JOVENES BOLIVIANAS-OS MOVILIZADAS-OS POR LOS DERECHOS SEXUALES Y REPRODUCTIVOS

Por Andrea Ramirez y Claudia Arroyo
Colectivo Juvenil DECIDE-CDD
REDLAC Bolivia

La Ley Marco de Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos, es el resultado de un conjunto de decretos, ordenanzas, leyes y normas que se han ido dando en Bolivia el año 1995 desde que nuestro gobierno se adscribió a los acuerdos de Beijing.

Esta ley permitirá que bolivianas y bolivianos de todas las edades, culturas, religiones, orígenes, orientaciones y preferencias tengamos la posibilidad de ejercer plenamente nuestra sexualidad de manera plena, placentera, libre de prejuicios y amparadas-os bajo el paraguas de los derechos humanos.

Actualmente esta ley esta siendo revisada por la sociedad civil debido a que el año 2004, fue aprobada por el Poder Legislativo boliviano pero devuelta por el Presidente de la República para su mayor debate. Por este motivo es que las Comisiones mixtas de Política Social y Derechos Humanos del Honorable Congreso de Bolivia, han convocado a un ciclo de Audiencias Publicas en todo el país para conocer la opinión de la sociedad civil en su conjunto, es de esta manera que el Colectivo Juvenil DECIDE como parte de la Red Latinoamericana y Caribeña por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos-REDLAC, esta participando activamente en la ya mencionada convocatoria para la aprobación de esta Ley.

Apoya con tu firma y súmate a la campaña a favor de la aprobación de la **LEY MARCO DE DERECHOS SEXUALES Y REPRODUVTIVOS EN BOLIVIA!!!!**

Celebrate the Beijing and Beyond—Global Week of Action

with the National Council for Research on Women as we host:

AN INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE: YOUNG WOMEN ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

Participants include: Franziska Brantner and Shireen Lee, CSW Youth Caucus; Victoria Budson, Women and Public Policy Program, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; Taylor Hatcher, George Washington University; Maiden R Manzanal, Youth Coalition; Elizabeth Plácido, Elige Red de Jóvenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos; Andrea Powell, Fair Fund; Svati Shah, Columbia University; Alison Stein, Younger Women's Task Force, National Council of Women's Organizations

When: March, 7

Where: Hunter College, President's Conference Room, 17th Floor, East Building,
68th Street and Lexington Avenue

Time: 2-4 pm

Where are the men and boys? Involving Men in Promoting Gender Equality

By Maiden Manzanal, the Philippines

Where are the men in the fight against gender inequality? It is absurd to say that men do not care about gender inequality and sexist oppression since, like girls and women, they are also subjected to daily oppressions due to the socially constructed roles and expectations assigned to them. The patriarchal society ascribed to both women and men's gender roles impede both sexes' capacity to fully become human beings. Although it goes a long way to assume that men and women take up issues of gender equality on the same level, women should partner with men to promote gender equality and empowerment of both sexes.

Early in life, boys and men are taught to behave and think as men who do not cry, do not feel pain, and do not feel any emotion at all; for that will show their weak attributes, especially as weakness is attributed only to women and girls. Young men were pressured to be sexually aggressive, to be breadwinners, to be male heroes and 'knights in shining armor'; however, all of these stereotypical images devalue their humanity and limit their choices and options for diversity, fullness of their expressions and capacity to strive for gender equal relations.

As men are socially nurtured to be 'more like men', they will not easily identify gender issues as something larger than issues of war, poverty, and daily ruminations that affect them. It can be regarded as a given, as it was handed down and perpetuated by all major societal institutions such as schools, churches, media, etc. Gender-sensitivity trainings and education is the first step to reflect on men and women's gender relations and curb the inequality that prevents both sexes from experiencing gender-based discrimination, VAW, stereotyping, and other manifestations of unequal gender relations.

But where are the men? It is important for our brothers, fathers, boyfriends, partners, husbands and all the men in our lives – including our (future) children, to be gender aware and sensitive as deconstructing gender paradigms should begin at home, and at the very core of our personal relations. There are millions of ways to partner with men. Projects that involve boys and men in addressing trafficking, VAW, political participation, gender mainstreaming, and sexual and reproductive health issues ranging from LGBT issues to HIV/AIDS to life skills, engender a new way of approaching men to work with women in making sure that the gains are not lost. Instead the gains continue to be made, not just by women but by enlightened men.

As the debates within the feminist movements intensify, it is now becoming an issue that will not go away. Indeed, spaces for women-only must be maintained and respected. But the issue is more than that of course. One of the emerging issues in the women's movement and the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is the involvement of men. It is strategic both in the realms of theory as well as at the practical level to engage men since women's fight against patriarchy is not just a woman's task but also a man's.

Ten years after the BpA was created, the women's movement must grapple with men and boys' involvement with gender equality efforts. We cannot deny the potential for alliance-building, partnership, and societal change, from the personal to the political level – the kind of change that this approach will ensure. To convert biological men to become gender sensitive men is yes, a very difficult process that takes time and energies and even funding. But the gains are plenty and the changes that we can expect are just the tip of the iceberg. Let us move from phobia with men and boys promoting gender equality and let's discuss this more.

Trafficking and Young Women

By Tanya Baker, Youth Coalition and Jostein Van Vliet, CHOICE



What will the UN do about the trafficking resolution?

The Youth for Women's Rights caucus does not support the United States' resolution "Reducing demand for trafficked women and girls" in its entirety. We believe that it is not a resolution on trafficking, but rather on prostitution.

Trafficking is a form of violence and exploitation and must be stopped. Young women are the predominant targets of trafficking, thus the discourse must include a youth perspective. In order to frame the debate we must also look at all the intersections of trafficking including migration, organized crime, health and protection and macroeconomics. Moreover, we must remember that trafficking varies in all areas of the world and all policies and laws must be specific to regions and countries.

Young women living under impoverished circumstances have extremely limited opportunities to improve the quality of their lives. The possibility of moving to a wealthier environment is often inviting to young women with few options and skills. Thus, the underlying causes of poverty and underdevelopment must be addressed when discussing migration and trafficking.

The profit from exploitation and coercion of these young women is immense. Specific attention and surveillance should be placed on the traffickers themselves. We believe that restricting the movement of all young women increases their vulnerability to trafficking and is more dangerous for the young women involved. We believe that restricting the freedom of movement of young women under the guise of anti-trafficking measures is a pure violation of their human rights.

The protection of trafficked young women's health and well-being is of utmost importance due to their vulnerability. Governments and civil society need to take special action to protect and promote the health and well-being of those who have been violated and exploited. In particular that they have access to nonjudgmental counseling, job training, access to legal services, and comprehensive health services, particularly for their sexual and reproductive health.

Macroeconomics plays a large role in the trafficking debate. Western countries' demand for cheap labour, along with their profiting of the sale of Western culture's materialism and consumption, must be discussed within the trafficking framework.

We urge all governments to separate trafficking from prostitution and to sign, ratify and implement the

Articles in The Watchdog express the views of the individual authors.