

THE WATCHDOG

GASS is All Over the Youth

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The Five Key Themes of the Youth Coalition:

1. 20% resource allocation
2. Sex education
3. Youth Participation
4. Sexual and reproductive health services
5. Sexual and reproductive rights are human rights.

The UNGASS, despite being initially tainted by the lack of consensus on rev 3 seems to have ploughed on regardless, as the ministers came to 'congratulate' the process and emphasize the need for action.

For many, this is a podium for national expression: the freedom to speak (naturally in a diplomatic manner) without the threat of interjections. Many used their 5 minutes (or more! !) to express the challenges and successes of the implementation of the PoA in the 5 years since Cairo.

For the United Kingdom, however, the Rt Honorable Minister Claire Short used the opportunity to highlight the main "issues" which need to be addressed. The Watchdog is pleased to report that the youth were one of these 'issues'. It seems that now, as the ICPD+5 process draws to a close, the Youth are beginning to be under-

stood as well as just heard and congratulated for their articulation. It seems that many are recognizing that we are fighting to reduce the same obstacles that many of the less youthful generations also faced in their time as youth.

As literature shows, basic human instinct seems to be timeless and universal, but attitudes are not and the gradual erosion of attitudes that inhibit the 'development of youth' seems to have been initiated by the Cairo PoA. We were deeply honored by Fred Sai's speech at the NGO briefing yesterday. His simply voiced tribute to us helped us realize we are not fighting a losing battle, as he talked of his own struggles and how he overcame them, highlighting the negative effect that ignorance can initiate.

The inspirational speech of Kofi Annan also helped us to see some hope in a process which seems to have become more about the dotting of Is and crossing the Ts than the effect this document will have on

society. There seems to be a gap between society and the UN that needs to be bridged to secure the further implementation of the watershed that is the PoA. At points in this conference, there seemed to be a need to take many of those involved outside and introduce them to reality, to allow them to make the critical link, that seems to have been lost between grass-roots and international meetings.

As Claudia Ahumada highlighted in the panel on "An Adolescent's Right to Information" on Wednesday, the discrepancy between the grass-root level youth empowerment programmes of the Catholic Church and the position the Church is taking in these meetings, where the issue of youth participation has posed some difficulties for the Holy See, is a reason why a letter was sent to the Holy See from several of the Youth Coalition mem-

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What's On?

The Greeks:

Washington Sq Park, Fifth Avenue between W4th St and Waverly Place At asphalt mounds southwest corner of the square. 8:00PM. Free. Outdoor theatre troupe RAKKA-THAMM!!!! brings the Trojan War to Washington Square.

Midsummer Night Swing:

8:15-11:00 pm \$11 admission includes dance session) Josie Robertson Plaza, 63rd Street and Columbus Avenue. Tickets at 6 pm in cash only.

Queens Symphony Orchestra:

Astoria Park, Queens. 7:30PM The QSO launches its summer 1999 season with an Independence Day Weekend series. Tonight's performance will include Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture and a Berlin medley.

Continued: GASS is All Over The Youth

"We came with our dreams, but also with our experience, which guides us to keep fighting for our cause and in turn strengthens the coalition"

bers (see Watchdog vol. 4).

The UNGASS seems not to reflect the position of the working group, where in contrast to the speeches, adolescents' issues remain contentious, and we are forced from the gallery to watch the gavel rapped on disconcertingly weak proposals, concerning our future and that of millions of other youth throughout the world.

We do not live in an idealized bubble, we are

aware of the "spirit of compromise" and realize that not all of our suggested amendments will be adopted. We came with our dreams, but also with our experience, which guides us to keep fighting for our cause and in turn strengthens the coalition.

The positive attention we have received in the first day of the UNGASS is amazing. To name but a few, the issues facing youth were highlighted by New Zealand, Na-

mibia, Nicaragua And we hope they will be highlighted today and tomorrow by many others. It seems, in this context the youth are being presented as a priority, let us hope this will be more than verbal prioritizing. We know these speeches are not heavily distanced from society, so we hope that words and action at the UN can coalesce, so that we may enjoy lives in a 'Cairoised' world.

By Gemma Hobcraft

Half of the 16,000 people who will become infected with HIV today are Youth, most of them women.



Adolescent Reproductive Rights are Human Rights Too

Regarding reproductive rights as human rights is not a radical notion, rather a concept firmly grounded in various United Nations conventions and international human rights consensus documents.

Paragraph 7.3 of the PoA states:

"Reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international laws and human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health...."

- If reproductive rights are human rights, then children and adolescents surely are protected by these rights as well, but adolescent reproductive rights have been a particularly difficult concept to "sell" due to a lack of understanding of the reproductive and sexual needs of adoles-

cents and some contention as to what these rights mean. Adolescent reproductive rights were officially recognized in 1989, under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The PoA defined for the international community, the concept of adolescent reproductive rights and brought the to the fore

- Para 7.3: "Adolescents are particularly vulnerable because of their lack of information and access to relevant services in most countries."
- Paragraph 7.45: "Recognizing the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and other persons legally responsible for adolescents to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the adolescent, appropriate direction and guidance in sexual and reproductive matters, countries must ensure that the programmes and attitudes of health care providers do not restrict the access of adolescents to appropri-

ate services and the information they need, including on sexually transmitted diseases and sexual abuse. In doing so, and in order to, inter alia, address sexual abuse, these services must safeguard the rights of adolescents to privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent, respecting cultural values and religious beliefs. In this context, countries should, where appropriate, remove legal, regulatory and social barriers to reproductive health information and care for adolescents."

Lack of both the widespread recognition of reproductive rights and the political pledge to advance and undertake methods to implement these rights have proven to be obstacles in their implementation, especially in the area of adolescent reproductive rights. It is important to push forward, to put these already agreed-upon concepts to use in creating even stronger, more specific and updated language.

By Alison-Maria Bartolone

"Regarding reproductive rights as human rights is not a radical notion, rather a concept firmly grounded in various United Nations conventions and international human rights consensus documents."

Imprisoned in Chin-Chin A tragic snapshot from Chile

"Her family remains unaware of the situation and her friends have only been to see her a couple of times. She has been incarcerated for 16 months."

"Cristina, 20-years-old and illiterate, became pregnant in the countryside, on one of the Cabuco Islands. When she realized she was pregnant, fearful of her family's reaction and with no support from her boyfriend, she left for the city where she found work in a store. A friend offered to take her to a woman who carried out "discreet" abortions. The woman charged her 30,000 pesos (app. US \$66), which Cristina raised only through great effort. She even borrowed money from her roommate.

The method used was a surgical probe. She developed an infection, which gave her a high fever and frightened her. The woman who performed the abortion told her to go to the emergency health unit and say she had fallen off the roof of her house and onto a pile of wood.

She managed to get to a hospital where they took care of her but they demanded to know who had performed the abortion.

No matter how much they threatened her, Cristina remained silent -- she remembered the woman had threatened to tell all to the police if her name was revealed. She was so frightened she said nothing and still keeps the woman's name a secret and as a result she was jailed. Her family remains unaware of the situation and her friends have only been to see her a couple of times. She has been incarcerated for 16 months."

Interview conducted on September 25, 1997 in Chin-Chin Prison in Chile, and excerpted from *Women Behind Bars: Chile's Abortion Laws — a Human Rights Analysis*, written and published by the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy and the Foro Abierto de Salud y Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos in Santiago Chile in 1998. También está disponible en español.

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Read *The Watchdog* Online:
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The Youth Coalition for ICPD is an organization composed of committed youth working at the local, national, and international levels to promote the full implementation of the Programme of Action stemming from the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo. The Youth Coalition emerged from the ICDP+5 Youth Forum, held in the Hague, in February 1999.

Through public education, advocacy, and coalition building, the Youth Coalition strives to ensure that the sexual and reproductive health rights, needs, and concerns of young people are addressed fully, and that young people from around the world are actively and meaningfully involved in all aspects of development, especially sexual and reproductive health, rights, and education issues. Its members, which range between the ages of 15 and 29, come from diverse backgrounds and represent every region in the world.

Look at me, when you talk about me!

To talk about youth participation in the areas of sexual and reproductive rights requires a reflection on the way in which we, the young people, have been looked at for long time. The most popular image: We're a vulnerable population. The youth is linked with the image of "half-done" human beings, still unable to think, understand, and act in a responsible way in regard to our sexual and reproductive health. Many of the difficulties that young people face while making choices about sexuality are associated with the way in which the national systems have provided their solutions to the requirements of education and health services.

Most of the programmes designed for the youth provide sketchy and superficial information. The sensitivity required when dealing with the 'edgy' youth is sorely lacking. The only informational overkill is of a biomedical nature. Other important facets of sexual and reproductive health are often glossed over completely. Like those of access to sex education; family and job pressures; culture; the changes of the traditional gender roles; the impact of the socioeconomic politics (like the ones of structural adjustment that are constantly being used today). A society needs to respond to the sexual and reproductive health of all sectors of the population, especially the youth. We

need access to the necessary tools to be able to make responsible and informed decisions about our sexuality. In order to generate respect for our sexual and reproductive rights, it is elemental to develop an efficient mechanism which allows young people to enjoy education and health services. Including the voice and opinions of young people in the decision making establishments helps to build programs and politics that are not just more sensible to our specific needs but also have a real chance of succeeding because of the concrete link with youth's perception and interaction, with reality.

By Gabriela Cano Azcarraga

COLOFON: Sonu, Gemma, Alison, Gabriela, Erin (Sorry your laptop won't Switch Off!)