



Statement 12th February 2008

“Hearing in the European Parliament on Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights of young people: a need for comprehensive sexuality Education in the South”

We are the voices of today and the future, young people from all over Europe
and
diverse voices from the South.

We are assembled here today for this *“Hearing in the European Parliament on Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights of young people: a need for comprehensive sexuality education in the South on the 12 February 2008.* We are passionate voices, strong voices, empowered voices and take this chance to speak up! We represent different beliefs, lifestyles and social backgrounds. We come from organizations that fight for the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all young people and their right to stand up for it. We stand before you supported by a strong civil society movement that shares this fight with us every day. In addition we find ourselves amongst decision and policy makers that share our interest and are open to our ideas and respect our right to participate! We share the same concerns and want to realize positive change and make sure the promises made by all governments in all the national and international commitments become reality.

We are concerned because:

- an estimated 82 million girls in the Global South who are now aged 10 to 17 will be married before their 18th birthday
- Some 14 million women and girls between ages 15 and 19 give birth each year. For both physiological and social reasons, girls under 18 are twice as likely to die in childbirth as those in their twenties.
- Almost half of all new HIV infections occur among young people. Most infections are acquired through unprotected sexual intercourse. Many of these new infections occur because young people don't have the knowledge or skills to protect themselves.
 - In 2007, 85 member countries of the UN still criminalize consensual same sex acts among adults. In 8 countries the death penalty is even considered by law as a possible punishment for homosexuality. In addition Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ) young people face stigma and discrimination on a daily basis.
 - The economic and social burden of not investing in comprehensive sexual education leads to loss of billions of Euros every year. ¹

¹ Chesson H. W., Blandford J. M., Gift T. L., Tao G. and Irwin K. L., The Estimated Direct Medical Cost of Sexually Transmitted Diseases Among American Youth, 2000. *Guttmacher Institute Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. Volume 36,

We are even more concerned because:

.... what is happening is an injustice as it can be prevented.

These facts show that many young people are disproportionately affected by SRHR issues especially in the Global South. Limited access to reproductive health services, information and education, gender inequality, and discrimination against the girl child contribute to the vicious cycle of poverty and prevent the MDGs being met by 2015.

We therefore ask you to consider:

.... young people have specific needs in relation to their sexual and reproductive lives. Many are struggling with decisions and lack autonomy regarding sex & relations, the use of contraception, marriage and the spacing of children. These are decisions that will influence them for the rest of their lives. They are disempowered and need information and access to services to enable them to make informed decisions about themselves and their lives.

An effective tool to address these issues is raising awareness and providing information to young people through ***comprehensive sexuality education***. It is a key tool for providing skills, knowledge and empowerment in the area of sex, sexuality and relationships for any young person, also challenging the prevailing gender stereotypes.

A comprehensive sexuality education program includes information as well as an opportunity to explore attitudes and develop skills in such areas as human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behaviour, sexual health, and society and culture. Comprehensive sexuality education enables choice and promotes safe, consensual sexual behavior including overcoming discrimination against young people marginalized due to their sexual orientation or HIV status.

We ask furthermore:

... make comprehensive sexuality education part of development policy on SRHR. This is essential to help realize a good sexual and reproductive health situation among young people in developing countries. Specifically when the education is connected to youth-friendly and confidential sexual and reproductive health services.

And acknowledge the right of young people to participate and let them:

...contribute to the content of policies, programs and projects that affect them as outlined in the ICPD Programme of Action. It is essential to involve young people in the process of development, planning and implementation of programs in order to create effective responses that meet the needs of young people.

To increase youth participation as a strategy for the development of comprehensive sexuality education programs there are several challenges to overcome. We need policy makers to act on their commitments. Young people need to be trained and supported to strengthen participation in decision making on policies & programme that affect their lives.

We also need to understand that building an effective youth-adult partnership takes time and needs investment of resources - financial as well as personal.

What the European Union must do

The European Union is the worlds' largest donor of development aid. It plays a key role in poverty reduction activities and helps setting the global development agenda. The EU must take a leading role in ensuring the following goals are met in relation to youth, sexual and reproductive health rights and comprehensive sexuality education:

INVOLVE

- Ensure meaningful participation of young people in decision making processes by realizing a youth consultancy mechanism for input towards Committees of MEPs working on development issues and discuss with them how policies can be designed and implemented.
- Invite young people in the Global South to the table when Country Strategy Papers are developed and priorities are set and to be included **as official delegates to United Nations Summits.**

SUPPORT

- We call for a scaled-up response by the European Union to invest in young people's sexual and reproductive health. The commitment of spending 20% on basic secondary education and basic health in the geographic programs should extend to the thematic programs within the European Unions official development assistance and should include the necessary budget allocations for comprehensive sexuality education.
- We call for financial support for training of youth advocates² by creating youth friendly funding streams geared towards development. Young people need training to have the confidence and skills to speak up, but also know what their rights are and what they can ask for.

² Young people involved should be representative of all sections of society including minority and marginalised groups

COMMIT

We call for commitment and necessary actions to achieve the agreed global development targets, particularly stated in the Cairo Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

Through committed and active partnership we will deliver together a sustainable response to address the challenges that young people face and enable them – now and in the future - to fully enjoy and realize their health, sexual pleasure, well-being and human rights.

This Statement is signed by:

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YSAFE – Youth Sexual Awareness for Europe Network
Y-PEER
World Population Foundation
DSW
International Women's Health Coalition
Youth Coalition
International Planned Parenthood Federation - European Network
Network of Asia Pacific Youth
RFSU - Swedish Association for Sexual Education
Women's Rights Center - Poland
Astra Youth Group – Poland
Sex Education Forum UK
France Family Planning Movement
UK Youth Parliament
Red INTERQUORUM - Peru
Lithuanian Family planning and sexual health association
Spanish Interest Group on Population Development and Reproductive Health
Forward UK
Nao Te Prives – Grupo De Defesa Dos Direitos Sexuais
Youth Club – Stip – Macedonia
Zaedno, Communication Support and Development Foundation
Living Positively Project - Youth Aids Coalition
AIDOS - Italian Association of Women for Development
CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality

And:

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