

Policy Division contribution for the DSG's meeting with the President of the International Women's Health Coalition, Françoise Girard - 3 September 2014

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. *On the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)*

Founded in 1984, the IWHC **promotes and protects the sexual and reproductive rights and health of women and young people—particularly adolescent girls**—in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East through support and strengthening of local leaders and organizations and at the national and regional levels; by advocating for international policies, programs, and funding; and by seeking to influence U.S. policy. IWHC is known as a strong voice for sexual and reproductive rights.

IWHC promotes a **vision** in which women and girls:

- Have access to the information and services they need to enhance and protect their health and achieve their full potential;
- Can make informed choices about their sexuality, relationships, pregnancy, childbearing, and marriage, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence;
- Are equally and effectively engaged in decisions that affect their sexual and reproductive rights and health; and
- Lead movements working to advance sexual and reproductive rights and health.

IWHC's **key advocacy priorities** include:

1. Advancing the rights of Adolescent Girls
2. Promoting Comprehensive Sexuality Education
3. Ending Early and Forced Marriage
4. Ensuring Safe and Legal Abortion

IWHC works primarily through:

1. **Global Advocacy** focus on Women, Health and Development
2. **Leadership and Advocacy Capacity-Building** of young women
3. Provision of **funding and technical support** to local civil society organizations providing access to safe and legal abortion, comprehensive sexuality education and programming addressing early and forced marriages.

IWHC current supports partners in 12 countries (4 in Latin America, 3 in Africa and 5 in Asia/Middle East)

IWHC positions on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) within the Post-2015 and 20th Anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) have been articulated in an article in Global Health Policy written by IWHC president Ms. Françoise Girard in July 2014. The key points include:

- Commitments made by governments 20 years ago at the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and in subsequent negotiations **can and must** be fully reflected in the development agenda that will succeed the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.
 - Since the ICPD inception, governments have expanded their understanding of a number of so-called controversial issues in the ICPD agenda, whether safe abortion, adolescent sexual and reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education, or sexual rights.
 - However, a highly organized conservative opposition has emerged to block inclusion of these issues in the post-2015 development agenda.
 - Countering this opposition will require a well-planned and determined mobilization by progressive forces from the Global North and South.
 - Successful advocacy by activists and civil society in the following fora has bolstered the movement for SRHR.
 - 2012 Commission on Population and Development,
 - 2013 Commission on the Status of Women,
 - Five regional “ICPD Beyond 2014” reviews—
 - Consensus reached in Montevideo in August 2013 by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) seen as “the most forward-looking document on SRHR ever agreed on in any diplomatic negotiation.” The 33 governments of the region fully acknowledged sexual rights and reproductive rights as essential for the achievement of social justice and sustainable development, and noted that countries that outlaw or severely restrict abortion continue to see high rates of maternal mortality and no decrease in the number of abortions. The Montevideo consensus urged states to amend laws restricting abortion to protect the lives of women and girls.
 - 6th Asian and Pacific Population Conference (APPC) organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok in September 2013. 38 Asian and Pacific governments issued their own progressive document with strong commitments to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights, including for adolescents.
 - Potential obstacles to achieving an explicit recognition of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the post-2015 development framework include “negotiation fatigue” among some diplomats and the possibility of sexual and reproductive health and rights and women’s rights being traded off in the UN General Assembly negotiations in deals involving other contentious issues such as climate change, financing for development, or migration.
2. On UN Women’s engagement/partnership with IWHC:
- On August 14th, IWHC, International Planned Parenthood Federation, Action Canada for Population and Development and International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission technical staff met with UN Women Policy Division technical colleagues to **share their priorities for the Post-2015 Framework broadly and understand more about the reports and guidance UN Women was planning for the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women and Beijing +20 sessions.**

During the discussion, IWHC clearly laid out their interests in the inclusion of “sexual rights” and comprehensive sexuality education as part of the SDG targets as well as legalization of abortion and ensuring a focus on adolescent girls. They also noted that the capacity of regional and national delegations participating in CSW and other negotiations needed additional support (i.e. training in advocacy and negotiation) and hoped that UN Women would be able to provide this.

3. With regards to the Open Work Group on SDGs

Within the most recent Open Working Group Sustainable Development Goals report shared in July. The following target (5.6) was discussed and observations made.

The final text of the target reads as follows:

5.6: ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the ICPD and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

Important to note is that the **most contested issue** was target 5.6 in the gender equality goal **on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights**.¹ Disagreements focus on “reproductive rights” and the reference to “review conferences”. Some delegations had wanted to include “national legislation” which did not make it in to the Co-chairs’ proposal. The Arab Group, Uganda, Chad, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, Iran, Djibouti asked to reopen the target. A number of European and Latin American delegates voiced strong support for the target, with others, such as G77 and Caricom refrained from commenting on it.

SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS:

- UN Women affirms that Sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential to the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment. They include rights to access essential information, education and services for all on issues such as sexuality (including comprehensive sexuality education), relationships, pregnancies and safe child birth. The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence (Beijing para 96). Legal and enforcement measures must protect the exercise of these rights.
- The Beijing Platform for Action (para 97) called for improved access to adequate health-care services, including safe and effective family planning methods and emergency obstetric care, recognizing the right of women and men to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant. UN Women is committed to safeguarding these rights and commitments enshrined in the Beijing Platform for Action.
- UN Women recognizes the critical needs of adolescents and young women as part of the efforts of the global health governance framework going forward need to be prioritized. There is a need for acceleration

¹ Excerpt from UN Women internal correspondence (July 19th)

in preventing adolescent pregnancies, unsafe abortions, maternal deaths, and HIV as well as significant gaps in availability, quality and access to comprehensive sexuality education and services for young people, especially in low-income countries. By working on preventing child marriage, we can dramatically improve the maternal and child health outcomes for millions of girls and women.

- We believe that the post-2015 development agenda has to address women's health in global governance, including reproductive health, across women's life spans, going beyond the narrow understanding of reproductive health in terms of childbearing, and recognize the unique health needs of women and girls at different ages, as well as their right to the highest attainable level of health. We also must address the human rights aspects that are crucial to establishing women's bodily autonomy and integrity and for access to information, services, and opportunities to act upon choices.