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General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3(b) Special theme of the fiftieth session² of the Commission based on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation

Statement submitted by FEMM Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council³

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ [E/CN.9/2017/1](#).

² Changing population age structures and sustainable development.

³ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The FEMM Foundation is a knowledge-based health programme for women inspired by women's right to be informed participants in their own healthcare and to make voluntary decisions based on options, information, and understanding. FEMM is dedicated to health education, medical research, and improving reproductive health care to advance women's health.

Health can foster or hinder essential elements of sustainable development. Poor health interferes with education, family life, and the ability to work. International law recognizes a right to the "highest attainable standard of health." This is important not only as a right, but as an enabler of participation in the social and economic life of one's community.

As an organization serving women's reproductive health needs, FEMM is working to address critical knowledge gaps that prevent women from understanding their bodies and achieving the highest attainable standard of health and their family size goals.

Population age structures, family planning and empowering women

Health is also connected to shifts in population age structures. Improved health outcomes are often cited as the reason for decreases in fertility; when couples know that their children will survive their earliest years, they may choose to have fewer children. Meanwhile, fertility treatments are a booming business in developed countries, as many couples struggle to have children; yet the options available to them are often costly, have low success rates, and raise ethical concerns.

Both of these relate to population age structures, but rather than focus on a particular structure, FEMM believes in empowering women to be able to achieve their goals. By focusing on health care and information that empower women, governments respect women's capacity to make their own decisions. Health care has often underserved both the health needs and fertility goals of women. FEMM empowers women in these areas and respects their right to make decisions about family size for themselves.

FEMM provides women education about their bodies to enable them to make informed choices about their health care. Informed consent involves a choice made voluntarily with information and understanding about the various treatment options and is a bedrock principle of medical care and ethics. To make an informed choice, women must be informed during family planning counselling about how their bodies work, what is necessary for health, how various family planning methods affect their bodies, and how soon after discontinuation their fertility will return. FEMM education enables women to make truly informed choices. This also helps women to make choices in other areas of their lives, such as employment and family life, which will help them to be active participants in sustainable development efforts.

The World Health Organization indicates that 225 million women have an unmet need for family planning. The rights to adequate family planning and the education and development of reproductive and sexual health in accordance with the culture, religion and beliefs of every community and every woman have long been

recognized. Since FEMM focuses on informed choices and the education of women, it is uniquely situated to provide new solutions in this area, which lead to women's empowerment and improved health outcomes. Information-based programmes are the most inclusive because they respect individual values and choices, and equip their users to make informed choices.

Women's health and sustainable development

Women and girls comprise approximately half the population of the world, but remain more vulnerable to health problems due to both biological and social reasons. Women also often accept as normal symptoms such as irregular bleeding, pain, depression, mood swings, and weight gain, nor realizing that these are often signs of underlying hormonal imbalances and abnormalities. Even when women do seek medical care, most health care providers and programs struggle to diagnose them and often can only treat the symptoms. These underlying conditions can affect women and girls' long-term overall health, sometimes irreversibly.

In order to address this need, FEMM has identified not only better ways to diagnose and treat women, but also ways to equip women to be informed participants in their own healthcare. Few women understand how to identify signs of health such as ovulation (only 3 per cent of women worldwide can identify it) or abnormalities in their menstrual cycles. Many women also do not understand the delicate interplay of hormones necessary for good health.

A woman who understands how her body works can monitor her health and seek help when needed. FEMM knows that hormones are essential to reproductive and overall women's health. Ovulation is the sign of health in women because it is the proof of sufficient hormone levels in the nine essential hormones that influence women's health. FEMM teaches women to understand this information and the signs that this presents in their body. In this way, FEMM women are able to identify abnormalities as they arise, seek health treatment when necessary, and ensure that their symptoms are not dismissed.

Many women experience signs of hormonal imbalances. They range from acne, to weight gain, depression, migraines, pain, irregular bleeding, and conditions such as polycystic ovarian syndrome. Many women are told that these symptoms are not important, or just in their head. They are told that irregular cycles are "normal" for them, and that these associated pains are simply the difficulty of being a woman. These symptoms can interfere with women and girls' education, work, and daily lives. We now have the science to understand that this is not true, and the ability to diagnose and treat the underlying cause of these symptoms and conditions. FEMM's innovative medical protocols are there to support women who identify these problems with doctors who can provide meaningful treatments at the root of the problem.

FEMM's Medical Management programme trains doctors to diagnose and treat reproductive health problems, with a holistic view of a woman's body that incorporates recent research on the complex hormonal interactions between different body systems. This interaction, and the delicacy of the hormonal activity in a woman's body, is essential to the experience of health in the entire female body. FEMM has developed innovative protocols that allow doctors to identify underlying

problems with precision and treat them effectively. This medical support provides treatments that help women to live healthy lives.

Policies should empower women for sustainable development

Policies and funding must reflect the needs and desires of women and what will actually work to meet them. This may involve examining education and preventive approaches to women's health care, such as FEMM. When women are educated through FEMM, they are empowered to make their own health-focused decisions, resulting in a healthier world. Healthy women are women who can participate in and contribute to their families and communities.

Women's participation in sustainable development requires the investment in women's health and health education. We know that informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, and that women play a key role in family and community health outcomes. The knowledge gained through FEMM can allow women to identify underlying health concerns and to achieve or avoid pregnancy.

When people attain the highest level of health they can, they are able to thrive and partake in their communities. The FEMM Foundation urges this Commission and Member States to adopt programmes that educate women about their bodies, empower them to take charge of their health, and make decisions about their family size. FEMM is prepared to address the needs of women through educational programs and improved medical support.
