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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by Advocates for Youth, the International Women’s Health Coalition, Pathfinder International and the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

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.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.



Statement

1. We represent a broad coalition of service and advocacy organizations that has come together to reinvigorate funding and support for adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health programmes, ensuring that the largest generation of young people in history has access to comprehensive services and is able to fully exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. We welcome the opportunity to review progress towards the achievement of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and accelerate efforts to secure the human rights, including the sexual and reproductive rights, of women and girls, at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

2. The Beijing Platform for Action, in line with the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development, recognized women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health as essential to leading a productive and fulfilling life. Moreover, the Platform for Action recognized that the right of women to control all aspects of their health, including matters related to their sexuality and reproduction, is basic to their empowerment. This right must be universally protected and promoted throughout the life cycle.

3. Fifteen years have passed since the landmark conference in Beijing took place. During that time, more than one quarter of the world's population was born.¹ Nearly half of the world's population, some 3 billion people, is currently under the age of 25, the majority living in developing countries. Given the urgent need to reach increasing numbers of young people with sexual and reproductive health information and services, we have watched, with growing concern, the lack of an urgent global focus on realizing the sexual and reproductive rights of adolescent girls and young women.

4. Doubly marginalized by virtue of both their sex and age, adolescent girls and young women suffer disproportionately from unintended and early pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and unsafe abortions. Young women aged 15 to 19 are twice as likely to die in childbirth as adult women, accounting for one seventh of the total maternal mortality globally.² Half of all new HIV infections occur in young people between the ages of 15 and 24, with adolescent girls and young women up to four times more likely to be infected with HIV than adolescent boys and young men.³ Sixty per cent of unsafe abortions in Africa, 42 per cent in the Latin America region and 30 per cent in Asia occur among women under the age of 25.⁴

5. Such statistics reflect a tremendous failure by the international community to appropriately prioritize and address the unique needs and circumstances that place adolescent girls and young women at increased risk. On the occasion of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, we call on all States to

¹ *World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009.

² United Nations Children's Fund, *State of the World's Children: Maternal and Newborn Health*, New York, 2009.

³ National Research Council, *Growing Up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries*, Washington, D.C., 2005.

⁴ World Health Organization, *Unsafe abortion: global and regional estimates of the incidence of unsafe abortion and associated mortality in 2003*, 5th edition, Geneva, 2007.

reaffirm their commitments, enshrined in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Millennium Development Goals to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health by 2015. More significantly, we call on States to translate their commitments into tangible actions to improve the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent girls and young women, enabling them to better participate in, benefit from, and contribute to the social, economic, political, and cultural life of their families, communities and countries.

6. Governments must prioritize sexual and reproductive health as part of an overall strengthening of health systems and find the political will and resources necessary to increase programmatic efforts specific to adolescent girls and young women, both married and unmarried. New and existing sexual and reproductive health programmes must address the particular challenges and distinct needs of adolescent girls and young women and implement tailored approaches aimed at reducing the significant barriers they alone face in accessing comprehensive information, care and services (including cultural norms and taboos about young people's sexuality and reproduction; lack of respect for young people's rights; judgmental and negative provider attitudes towards young people; policies/guidelines that restrict young people's access; limited mobility and power; high cost of services; inconvenient hours and locations; and fragmentation of services).

7. In concert with strengthening programmatic efforts for adolescent girls and young women, we urge States to actively and meaningfully engage communities, in particular adolescent girls and young women, in the design, implementation and evaluation of adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health programmes. Participation is paramount to ensuring programmatic efficacy and long-term sustainability, as well as building the institutional, management and technical capacity of adolescent and youth organizations. We also urge States to develop mechanisms to track the amount of funding allocated to adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and to disaggregate data by age and sex in order to measure progress and build support for improved outcomes among adolescent girls and young women.

8. As part of their renewed commitment, we urge States to eliminate policies that restrict access to services based on age, marital status and/or parental consent and to establish policies and legislation that promote gender equality and reduce social exclusion. We urge States to integrate the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescent girls and young women into national health, development and poverty-reduction strategies and to promote collaboration among sectors, specifically health, education, democracy and governance, social justice and social welfare and economic development in order to provide more holistic programmes to adolescent girls and young women.

9. We call on States, in all of their political and programmatic efforts to address adolescent girls and young women, to address the underlying factors that contribute to the susceptibility of adolescent girls and young women to ill-health by protecting, respecting and fulfilling women's and girls' human rights. In this regard, combating harmful traditional practices, such as early marriage and childbearing and female genital cutting, is essential — as is challenging traditional gender norms that limit the independence and mobility of adolescent girls and young women, including their freedom to make decisions, and that keep them ignorant of their bodies, health and

options. We urge the provision of accurate and complete sexual and reproductive health information and services to adolescent girls and young women, including comprehensive sexuality education and the full range of contraceptive methods and reproductive health services available.

10. We urge all States to recognize the role of the wider community, particularly men and boys, in improving the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent girls and young women, and call on States to foster a favourable environment that supports and maintains behaviour change and health improvements for both sexes and promotes gender equality, accountability and equity.

11. Adolescent girls and young women are the stewards of our collective futures, catalysts for transforming our societies and essential assets in all efforts to address the urgent development issues facing us globally. Enabling adolescent girls and young women to fully exercise their right to sexual and reproductive health is vital to improving their educational, economic and social status in all parts of the world, and is therefore also vital to the economic and social development of individual families, communities and nations, and to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

12. It is time commitments that were made to protect and promote the health and rights of adolescent girls and young women were realized. We cannot afford to wait for the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action if we are to positively impact the lives of adolescent girls and young women today, or the outcome and prosperity of the developing world in the twenty-first century.
