



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-fifth session

22 February-4 March 2011

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**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**

### **Statement submitted by the International Planned Parenthood Federation, a non-governmental organization 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.

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\* E/CN.6/2011/1.

## Statement\*

1. The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) welcomes the priority theme of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women “Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work”.

2. Working through 151 Member Associations in 173 countries IPPF is committed to implementing the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing), the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) all of which strive to advance gender equality and empower women. In addition, in September 2010 world leaders pledged to address women’s and children’s health through the Global Strategy. This involved scaling up and prioritizing a package of high impact interventions and integrating efforts across diseases and sectors such as health, education, water, sanitation and nutrition to promote human rights gender equality and poverty reduction. IPPF recognizes that sexual and reproductive health and rights are central to addressing obstacles related to women’s advancement worldwide. These obstacles impede girls’ and young women’s health and well-being, their ability to participate in education, full employment and decent work as well as preventing the achievement of internationally agreed goals and commitments to gender equality and equitable, sustainable social and economic development.

3. In 2007, 1.3 billion of the 1.5 billion young people aged 12-24 lived in low- and middle-income countries. Some 42 per cent live in poverty and many lack access to basic health services, particularly SRH services as well as to education. Over 500,000 young people are newly infected with a sexually transmitted infection each day (excluding HIV) while over 50 per cent of all new HIV infections occur among young people aged 15-24. Girls and young women bear a disproportionate burden of ill health related to sexual and reproductive health.

4. While all young people have important contributions to make to society, we must ensure that the rights, needs and contributions of young women and girls are prioritized in order to improve health and accelerate development. Many young women have no real opportunity to contribute to their own well-being or to society. They are denied the right to full education and to essential health services. This is not only a denial of their individual human rights but also makes it increasingly difficult for many countries to eliminate poverty and achieve their development goals.

5. IPPF recognizes the link between development and the access and participation of women in education, health and meaningful employment. As per Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, IPPF recognizes that education is a human right and that there is a bridge between education and health which is essential for development at all levels. Research shows that if a young woman delays childbearing until she has achieved her own educational goals, it has broad social and economic benefits, not just for her, and her family, but for society at large. Research demonstrates that an extra year of schooling for girls reduces fertility by 5 to 10 per cent.

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\* Issued without formal editing.

6. Educated women have more options. Children of educated women are healthier and better educated. It is vital that young women and men and girls and boys have access to comprehensive and gender-sensitive sexuality education in both formal and informal educational settings. This provides knowledge and reduces gender stereotypes and violence against women. This is critical as, for example, up to 32 per cent of all women have been exposed to intimate partner violence during pregnancy, 50 per cent of sexual assaults are on girls under 15, and in South Africa a woman is killed by her intimate partner every 6 hours.

7. Secondary education impacts on health, age of first pregnancy and number of children as well as employment, family income and aspirations. It delays girls' first sexual experience and child bearing and reduces the risk of early pregnancy and maternal mortality and morbidity such as obstetric fistula. The risk of dying from pregnancy-related causes is much higher for adolescents than for older women. Adolescent pregnancy is dangerous for the child too: stillbirths and death in the first week of life are 50 per cent higher among babies born to mothers younger than 20 than among mothers aged 20 to 29. However, approximately 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 give birth every year — around 11 per cent of all births worldwide, the vast majority of which occur in developing countries. Delayed first births, later marriage, birth spacing, fewer healthier babies, and better educated, better fed families, are all largely the result of secondary education and access to family planning services and comprehensive sexuality education. This in turn leads to freedom for further training/education/decent employment, so lifting families out of poverty.

8. Secondary education reduces the incidence of child marriage. Similarly, girls who complete secondary education are much less likely to become infected with HIV. Comprehensive and gender-sensitive sexuality education and information integrated into the curriculum also help to reduce early unplanned pregnancy. The single largest killer of girls and young women is complications from pregnancy and childbirth including unsafe abortion. Over 2.5 million unsafe abortions are carried out every year on adolescent women (aged 15-19) in developing countries. As such there is a clear link between sexual and reproductive health, access to health services, access to education, gender equity, well-being and development.

9. It is vital that the quality and relevance of education are prioritized. Schools must ensure that they do all that they can to retain pupils, especially girls. It is important that girls who become pregnant while at school are not forced to leave. This perpetuates gender inequality, makes pregnancy a detrimental experience, stripping young women of opportunities for social, economic and political empowerment. There are examples of promising policy reform. Pregnant schoolgirls at Pekenene School in Botswana are now allowed to return to school after giving birth. During maternity leave, schoolwork and other resources are sent to girls' homes and the school has developed a curriculum that includes distance education modules. This makes it possible for pregnant girls to continue learning from home instead of being marginalized. On return to school, the girls return with their babies as the school has crèche facilities. The project requires the father, if at school, to share the responsibility of looking after the baby. In Cameroon, girls now have the right to negotiate the duration of their maternity leave with their school, and can arrange for extra classes. Schools also need to ensure that they are safe places for girls — free from harassment from students and teachers, with sanitation and sanitary facilities available. In addition, transport to and from school needs to be safe for girls. These measures reduce absenteeism.

10. There are many other reasons why secondary education should be expanded. It increases more equal opportunities for employment and supports inclusive growth. It is clear however, that boys and young men have far greater access to education than their female counterparts. Already 39 million girls fail to attend primary school. In 2005 only 53 of 171 countries with data had achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education. Of the 113 countries that failed to achieve gender parity in both primary and secondary education by the target date of 2005, only 18 are likely to achieve the goal by 2015.

11. The benefits of educating girls can be clearly seen for them as individuals, for their families, communities and for national development. Closing the gender gap in education adds 0.5 per cent to a country's per capita gross domestic product; each year of schooling increases a woman's income by 10 to 20 per cent. Women return 90 per cent of earnings to families, well above men. Income earned and controlled by mothers has a 20 times greater effect on the health of their children compared with fathers'. Increasing women's economic opportunities — and control of assets — are a path out of poverty.

12. Women's participation in social, economic and human development and benefits are well documented and a proven intervention for health and development. Paragraph 51 of the Beijing Declaration states "Women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process". This contributes to higher aspirations on the part of their children, economic growth, empowerment and participation including in governance. The percentage of women in governance remains low which in turn impacts on health and education policies, and other policies that would encourage gender equity and participation. In 2009, only 18.5 per cent of parliamentarians were women.

13. Because most unremunerated work takes place within the home, women who undertake such work can become isolated and vulnerable to physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse. It is widely acknowledged that women and girls provide the majority of care to individuals who are living with HIV. This is a substantial responsibility that should be borne by the State. The failure of Governments to provide essential health care and services results in additional domestic burdens for women and girls. Sharing domestic and care responsibilities more equally between men and women is therefore an important means by which to improve the health, well-being and participation of women and girls. Increases in women's education, good sexual and reproductive health including access to family planning and employment not only benefit families but also drive up gross domestic product. An increase of just 1 per cent in the number of girls with secondary education boosts annual per capita income growth by 0.3 per cent.

14. Girls who are educated are more likely to have fewer and healthier children, further apart and be healthy and employed. Access to family planning, information and comprehensive sexuality education prevents early pregnancy and therefore promotes their chance of a full education — a virtuous circle which has been demonstrated to be an extremely effective health and development intervention. Investment in women and girls, in their education, especially secondary education, in their health, especially their sexual and reproductive health and investing in their empowerment and employment drives sustainable social and economic

development. Governments should guarantee access to comprehensive and gender-sensitive sexuality education: Research demonstrates that comprehensive and gender-sensitive sexuality education has a positive impact on young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights including services and contraception to meet unmet need of 215 million women and 1.75 billion young people.

15. It is vital that Governments ensure greater access of girls and young women to education that promotes gender equity. This will include: access to comprehensive and gender-sensitive sexuality education, policies and support that enable married and pregnant students and young mothers to continue their education, learning environments free from gender-based discrimination and violence, specific emphasis on increasing access for girls and young women to secondary education and the meaningful participation of girls, young women and women in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational programmes.

16. For the goals of the ICPD, Beijing and the MDGs to be achieved, investment in the access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work is a prerequisite. Furthermore, the new development framework for 2015 must include meaningful goals related to women's empowerment, human rights, education, health and participation.

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