



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 November 2014

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-ninth session

9-20 March 2015

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to
the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Center for Reproductive Rights, 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.



Statement

In 1995, States came together in Beijing with a mission to more fully define and commit to ensuring equality for women in all aspects of their lives. The twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action provides the opportunity to reflect on advancements in the recognition of women's human rights over the past 20 years and assess progress towards achieving gender equality. With the ongoing negotiations surrounding the post-2015 development agenda, this anniversary also provides the opportunity to translate into action the commitments and obligations that States have made towards achieving women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, including as they relate to women's and girls' reproductive rights.

The Beijing Platform for Action brought States together to agree that "equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. It specifically acknowledges the role that health, particularly sexual and reproductive health, plays in women's equality. The Platform for Action relates reproductive health back to women's human rights, including the rights to decide on the number and spacing of children, to attain the highest standard of physical and mental health and to be free from discrimination and violence, and recognizes that government action to promote reproductive health should be based on these rights.

Indeed, reproductive rights have a significant impact on the lives of women and girls and thus on the achievement of gender equality. Where women's rights to equality and non-discrimination are not fulfilled, women's ability to gain access to reproductive health services and make meaningful choices about their reproductive lives is limited. In addition, where women are unable to gain access to reproductive health services, the inequalities and discrimination that women face are exacerbated owing to the differentiated impact that childbearing has on women's health and lives, including in the spheres of education and employment. Gender inequalities create gender-specific barriers to the realization of women's rights, including historical and systemic discrimination; gender stereotypes about women as mothers, caregivers and child bearers; and traditional and cultural beliefs about the role of women in society that limit their opportunities for development.

As the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the discussions to date on the post-2015 development agenda show, gender equality is a necessary and fundamental precondition for people-centred development. International human rights norms provide concrete guidance on realizing women's right to equality. Consequently, linking human rights and development is critical for the creation of a fairer and more just society. A human rights-based approach to development guarantees that all individuals, including the most marginalized, are included in the process of raising the standard of living and that development programmes respect people's fundamental rights. Thus, it is essential that the post-2015 development agenda be based on the human rights obligations and commitments that States have made, building programmes that promote respect for and the protection and fulfilment of the full range of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, including in the areas of gender equality and reproductive rights.

Over the past 20 years, international, regional and national human rights bodies have recognized that reproductive rights are human rights, clarifying that violations of reproductive rights are primarily manifestations of discrimination, poverty and violence. These rights include the right to accessible, acceptable, available and good-quality reproductive health information and services, including maternal health services, contraception and abortion, for all women and girls everywhere. It also includes the need to ensure that women can exercise self-determination in their decision-making about reproductive health.

An essential part of ensuring gender equality, in the context of development, is to hold States accountable for their human rights and development obligations and commitments. Human rights institutions have proven effective in clarifying States' obligations to respect, protect and fulfil women's human rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights, and in holding States accountable for the lack of implementation of their commitments. The human rights framework provides clarity on the expectations and obligations of States in addressing women's reproductive rights and gender equality and provides the framework for monitoring and assessing States' compliance in transparent, international forums.

Human rights-based accountability is multifaceted. It requires public participation in the design and implementation of programmes to address State obligations and commitments. It also requires that States collect disaggregated and publicly accessible data, which are then used to consistently report to accessible and effective monitoring mechanisms. Finally, it requires that individuals have access to effective and meaningful remedies at the national, regional and international levels when there are violations of individuals' rights. As the work of the Human Rights Council, the United Nations treaty monitoring bodies and the United Nations special procedures shows, this regular and transparent monitoring and evaluation can dramatically increase States' compliance with their international obligations and commitments.

States now have an opportunity to address gender inequality by ensuring that reproductive rights, including the equality aspects of reproductive rights, are reflected in development goals and programmes, putting rights into action. In particular, States must ensure that there are specific targets and indicators on reproductive rights and gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda and develop accountability mechanisms that monitor compliance and promote gender equality.
