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to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by IPAS, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

IPAS welcomes the review of challenges and achievements in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women 25 years since its adoption and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognized that, “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” (Para 96), and reiterated that women’s ability to control their own fertility is the base for the enjoyment of other rights. (Para 97).

Governments also committed to “consider reviewing laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abortions” (Para 106(k)). Since then, numerous authoritative bodies within the United Nations human rights system, including the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, have also increasingly urged governments to ensure women’s ability to access safe abortion and post-abortion care. Additionally, international human rights authorities and bodies have established the negative effects of criminalization of abortion and the resulting violations of women’s rights to equality, non-discrimination, health, privacy, information, education, and freedom from inhumane treatment and torture.

Consequently, in the last 25 years there has been a global trend toward the liberalization of abortion laws nearly 50 countries worldwide have expanded the grounds under which abortion is legal. Nearly half of these countries are in Africa.

Yet, women in much of the world still face discriminatory laws and lack the autonomy and power to make decisions about their reproductive future. The 2020 review provides a critical opportunity for states to fully comply with the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action’s recommendations and to take the steps necessary to ensure that women’s and girls’ rights are respected. Such action is essential to the advancement of reproductive justice and gender equality thus truly putting women’s and girls’ health and human rights at the core of human development.

In order to protect the health, life, and dignity of women and girls, the 2020 Beijing review must include a commitment to immediate action to:

- Promote an enabling environment for the fulfilment of women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Eliminate laws and policies that affect sexual and bodily autonomy, and criminalize reproductive health services and abortion, including self-induced abortion.
- Release all women and girls and health-care professionals who are incarcerated as a result of punitive abortion laws.
- Ensure universal health-care coverage that integrates an essential package of sexual and reproductive health and rights services and information into national strategies and programs. This package must include contraceptive services; maternal and newborn care; prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS; care for STIs other than HIV; comprehensive sexuality education; safe abortion care; prevention detection and counseling for gender-based violence; prevention, detection and treatment of infertility and cervical cancer; and counseling and care for sexual health and well-being.

- Provide equal and non-discriminatory access to comprehensive high quality sexual and reproductive health services to all women and girls regardless of age, ethnicity, gender identity, geographic location, marital status, race, religion, socio-economic status or migration status.
 - Meet the sexual and reproductive needs of young, vulnerable and marginalized populations through programs that recognize the intersectional needs of these groups and help to improve equity and ensure their access to contraception and abortion.
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