

Commission on the Status of Women

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Review of the implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, and review of its contribution to shaping a gender perspective towards the full realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

Statement submitted by IPAS and International Alliance of Women, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

This year the Economic and Social Council will review implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and how it can contribute to meeting the Millennium Development Goals. We would like to offer the following points for consideration in the panel discussions and plenary sessions, focusing on four issues of great importance: Managing the consequences of sexual violence against women and girls, broadening the involvement of men in reproductive health, enabling women to exercise their reproductive rights, and linking or integrating various aspects of reproductive health.

1. Managing the consequences of sexual violence against women and girls

UN Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) called on governments to debunk myths that fuel sexual violence and to take measures to particularly eliminate sexual violence against women and girls in conflict situations. This was reiterated in Security Council resolution 1888 (2009).

Paragraphs 124g and 125a of the Platform for Action not only address sexual violence in conflict situations but also in daily life; they call for the development of strategies to ensure that women who survive violence are not re-victimized because of gender-insensitive laws or judicial or enforcement practices and for the provision of medical, psychological and legal services to help them cope with the consequences of violence.

In addition to measures to eradicate sexual and domestic violence, we call for enhanced efforts to effectively implement programs and interventions to help women and girls who become victims and survivors of domestic and sexual abuse deal with the physical and emotional consequences. This would include provision of: prompt treatment of physical and emotional trauma, emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis of HIV infection, screening and treatment of sexually-transmitted infections, and socio-legal assistance where women wish to press charges or leave abusive living conditions.

2. Broadening the involvement of men in reproductive health

Platform for Action paragraphs 107e and 109l call for programs to enable men of all ages to effectively take responsibility for: promotion of gender equality; responsible sexual and reproductive behavior, including prevention of sexually transmitted infections and condom use; parental responsibility; and elimination of violence against women in both public and private life.

Growing numbers of groups of men against violence and for gender equity are doing great work to promote gender sensitivity and gender equity. However, the topics of rape-related

pregnancy, other unwanted pregnancies and reproductive choice are still not broadly broached in their publications and campaigns.

We urge the members of these groups, and men everywhere, to take responsibility for reproductive rights as a men's issue by actively promoting and supporting both safe motherhood and women's access to emergency contraception and safe abortion.

3. Enabling women to exercise their reproductive and sexual rights

Paragraph 106k of the Platform for Action states that prevention of unwanted pregnancies must always be given the highest priority and that women should have access to post-abortion care and safe abortions as permitted by law. It also says that States should consider reviewing laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abortions. Over 400 legislators and Ministers at the Fourth Global Parliamentarians' Conference on Population and Development in October 2009 reiterated this and also called for a review of "all laws and practices that still restrict access to sexual and reproductive health services."

We call on governments, multilateral organizations, donor agencies and civil society groups to incorporate full reproductive rights, including access to safe legal abortions, into their advocacy for women's rights.

Paragraph 83k requests governments to "Remove legal and regulatory and social barriers, where appropriate, to sexual and reproductive health education within formal education regarding women's health issues." In addition, paragraph 94 reiterates that reproductive health "also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations." Accordingly, we ask the afore-mentioned groups to include education on sexual rights into their programs of sexual and reproductive health education. This will further help fulfill the need identified in paragraph 95 to meet "the educational and service needs of adolescents to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality."

4. Linking or integrating various aspects of reproductive health

Paragraph 106c of the Platform for Action emphasized a need to design and implement, in cooperation with women and community-based organizations, gender-sensitive health programs that address women's needs throughout their lives, taking into account their multiple roles and responsibilities and demands on their time.

The above-mentioned Parliamentarians' Conference supported this recommendation, calling for the full integration of a "basic and affordable package of sexual and reproductive health services and information in community based facilities, including services for family planning, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, reproductive tract infections, cervical and breast cancer screening and prevention, and maternal and newborn and child health."

Some multilateral and civil society organizations are working on aspects of such linkages and integration. We urge more groups to do so and to incorporate aspects of reproductive health which are often left aside in such programs, such as emergency contraception, safe abortion care and HPV vaccination.