

ICPD BEYOND 2014 • INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

# human rights

## CHAIR'S REFLECTIONS

### ICPD beyond 2014 International Conference on Human Rights “All different, all human, all equal”

We are here to celebrate. Celebrate the paradigm shift that Cairo represents and that has been repeatedly reaffirmed over these last 20 years. The Programme of Action provided us with a challenge and a tool to protect and fulfill human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, for all, especially women and adolescents, particularly girls.

Human rights are guarantees of the inherent dignity of every human being and the ICPD put human rights at the center of development. Nearly 20 years later, we have accomplished a lot and we have learned a lot.

This Conference, like the ICPD, brought people together from many different backgrounds and cultures, committed to the principles of the Programme of Action as well as its follow up reviews. This diversity of over 130 countries represented by government officials, more than 100 civil society representatives, parliamentarians, academia and service providers, and 8 UN agencies is a source of unique strength for us. We have been living the slogan of the conference: **all different, all human, all equal**.

In line with the GA resolution 65/234 and the concept note for the ICPD Beyond 2014 Review, the key issues coming out of this conference will feed into the Secretary General's Report and other documents arising out of the review process.

In the past days, we have acknowledged significant achievements since 1994:

- Fewer women are dying in childbirth;
- More and more girls are going to school;
- Access and use of contraceptives has increased tremendously;
- Laws have been adopted in a number of countries outlawing child marriage and expanding access to safe abortion;

- United Nations bodies and human rights mechanisms have provided important guidance on how governments can fully ensure gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights.

Several strong messages have come out of the discussions at this historic Conference:

- Gender equality was identified as a prerequisite for any advancement of women's and girls' human rights. We know that despite our many commitments to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, it remains pervasive in every society and country, and is one of our greatest human rights and development challenges. Discrimination and different forms of violence against women, including sexual violence and harmful practices, continue to severely affect women's enjoyment of human rights, in particular their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Preventable maternal mortality is one of the most striking examples of inequality as is child marriage – and we know that this can be eliminated in one generation.
- Another strong message is that rights related to sexuality and reproduction are universal human rights, meaning:
  - that they are the right of every single human being, irrespective of race, sex, ethnicity, religion, political or other opinion, or any other status,
  - that all States have obligations to ensure these rights, regardless of level of development,
  - that all duty-bearers have obligations to respect individuals' inherent dignity and rights – putting this into practice is not just about money but about political will.
- Furthermore, the discussions overwhelmingly affirmed that ensuring sexual and reproductive rights requires an enabling environment where people can exercise autonomy and choice. This means:
  - That all individuals, particularly women, adolescents and youth, must be empowered to claim their human rights.
  - That all individuals have the right to information, education and participation free from discrimination, coercion and violence.
  - That all individuals' rights to freedom of expression and association must be respected. In this regard, we specially emphasized that human rights defenders, including NGOs and service providers, must be protected and supported in their work.

- We heard strong calls for men and boys to be champions and meet their own responsibility for eliminating discrimination and violence against women and girls. Men and boys can contribute to normative change by actively promoting gender equality and fighting gender based violence, and in this regard, interventions should engage them for awareness raising.
- We also have heard strong calls that human rights' violations cannot be justified in the name of culture, religion and tradition. Systems of beliefs and values should uphold the dignity of people – women, men, and youth. Also, we discussed the positive role that religious and community leaders can play in promoting human rights.

These strong messages make clear that we still have unfinished business to meet the commitments that were agreed by consensus in the ICPD Programme of Action.

We have been on a long journey in just three days to accelerate progress toward equality, quality and accountability. Let me take each of these in turn:

**First, equality:**

It is abundantly clear that women and girls living in poverty, particularly in the lowest two income quintiles in both rural and urban areas, do not have access to the sexual and reproductive health services, information and education that they want and need. Many of these women and girls, as well as those with higher incomes, face multiple forms of discrimination, violence and coercion because they are living with disabilities or HIV, they are sex workers, they are members of indigenous communities, they are domestic workers, or they live in conflict or disaster situations, among many other circumstances. We learned that worldwide still many countries have discriminatory legislation towards women.

We further underlined the fact that adolescents, particularly girls, nearly everywhere, face serious barriers in exercising their rights to comprehensive sexuality education and to sexual and reproductive health services. Like women, adolescents who live in poverty, and/or who experience other disadvantages and marginalization, encounter unique deprivations.

Grave concerns were voiced about discrimination, violence and human rights violations against LGBTI individuals. Calls were raised to treat all human beings with dignity and respect.

Redressing all of these profound inequalities, affecting billions of the world's population, must be an urgent priority.

## **Second, quality of care:**

The right to health requires that education, information and services must be available, accessible, affordable, acceptable and of good quality, without discrimination, coercion or violence. We are far from meeting these human rights norms, but we know what we have to do so that women, girls, men and boys have the sexual and reproductive health information and services that they need at different points in their lives. These are to:

- Remove legal and other barriers to access to sexual and reproductive health services;
- Provide comprehensive sexuality education for all adolescents and young people; so that today's young have evidence-based information about how their bodies work, and the knowledge and skills to develop relationships based on human rights and gender equality;
- Enable choices among the widest possible range of contraceptive methods, including emergency contraception, and other sexual and reproductive health services;
- Allocate adequate human and financial resources in compliance with human rights standards;
- Ensure the availability of quality and integrated sexual and reproductive health facilities, services and goods; this includes services such as counseling, emergency obstetric care, safe abortion services and HIV prevention and treatment as well as services addressing gender-based violence; and
- Train and supervise health workers in both technical skills and also human rights, so that they guarantee privacy, confidentiality and fully informed and free consent for each and every person, regardless of age, marital status, sexual orientation and gender identity or other characteristics.

## **Third, accountability:**

Accountability requires a range of actions by both state and non-state actors. Human rights accountability has the potential to transform power relations, between men and women, service providers and users, and governments and citizens. Accountability is a shared responsibility of government, civil society, private sector, and international development partners.

Accountability requires national leadership and strong and effective institutions as well as the creation of an enabling environment for civil society. Active and informed participation of people without discrimination is a foundational requirement for ensuring accountability. States must enact policies and programmes with clear goals and budget allocations that can be monitored, with indicators to measure compliance with human

rights standards. Systems must also be established and strengthened to collect, analyze, disseminate and act on the information gathered.

States must prevent human rights' violations and ensure to all victims the right to an effective remedy and to reparations. In the past two decades, there have been several landmark judgments at the national and international levels that have contributed to stronger legal standards protecting human rights in these areas. Parliamentarians are key partners who can be accountability champions. We have been inspired by national human rights institutions that have exposed violations of human rights and thereby changed government policies.

Finally, we must support and protect all people who defend human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, such as advocates, human rights experts, service providers, and everyone in this room. Without them and us, full achievement of the goals of ICPD will not be possible.

**Looking forward and beyond 2014**, we know that the world is rapidly changing. In every region of the world, we have seen how people are increasingly demanding their rights and standing up against human rights violations. A new era of information, education and globalization offers enormous opportunities which we must capitalize on. This is our chance to dismantle gender stereotypes, tackle taboos and harmful practices, ensure that people have access to accurate information and enable them to make autonomous and informed decisions about their lives, sexuality and reproductive choices.

The ICPD agenda was a result of social movements working together with governments and the UN and these partnerships have been crucial for implementing the Program of Action over the past 20 years. Working together, we can put human rights and gender equality at the center of the ICPD review process and the post 2015 agenda. Concretely, this means that the unfulfilled ICPD commitments to provide universal access to sexual and reproductive health, and to protect and fulfill the human rights of all, with special attention to disadvantaged and marginalized groups, must be at the heart of global agendas. This should result in enhancing the autonomy and dignity of individuals.

The experiences we have shared over the past three days have conveyed the urgency of our work. We have discussed many challenges, but more importantly we have heard how many in this room and globally are actively changing the world as we speak. This provides unprecedented momentum to move forward towards new frontiers, to address new realities and to tackle neglected issues. We will make the most progress if we continue in the spirit of dialogue and collaboration established in the last three days, knowing and respecting the fact that we are all different, all human, all equal.

