

THIRD AFRICAN CONFERENCE ON SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS

ABUJA, NIGERIA

FEBRUARY 4 TO 7, 2008

DRAFT CALL TO ACTION

We, the participants of the Third Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights (Abuja, February 2008), **affirm that Sexual Rights are an integral and inalienable part of basic Human Rights**. This requires African states to be accountable to their citizens for their sexual health and rights.

We call for increased accountability across the African continent at all levels – governments, institutions, civil society, communities, families and individuals.

We specifically call for

1. Governments, in partnership with Civil Society Organizations, to intensify efforts to disseminate information on policies and programmes established for the implementation of the MDGs. Governments and stakeholders should recognize that progress towards the attainment of MDGs will not be made without renewed efforts to address MDGs 4 and 5, and the new target of universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and services.
2. Governments and stakeholders to advance and commit resources to the Maputo Plan of Action as an African Road Map for the attainment of the MDGs and for the promotion of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.
3. Policy makers, public sector, researchers, NGOs, private sector, communities and others to foster partnerships and strengthen collaboration to strengthen advocacy, programme implementation, research, monitoring and evaluation and resource utilization.
4. All stakeholders to strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems in order to track progress made in the advancement of the cause of sexual health and rights.
5. Resources committed towards ensuring access, awareness and support for implementation of comprehensive SH and R programmes for underserved and marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, displaced people and refugees, children, prisoners, rural and urban poor, young people and the elderly.
6. Governments to immediately domesticate the March 2007 UN Convention for People with Disabilities, especially Articles 16 and 25 of the convention.
7. Strengthened research by government, researchers and practitioners that will provide gender-desegregated data on SHR.
8. Governments, civil society, programme implementers and policy makers to build capacity for improved sexual health and rights services and programmes.

9. Governments to abolish laws which discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and commit to recognize the sexual rights of gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and intersex people in partnership with civil society and communities.
10. Governments to abolish laws which discriminate against women who choose to terminate their pregnancies.
11. Development and implementation of age and culturally appropriate programmes for comprehensive sexuality education across the life cycle.
12. Resource commitments to ensure increased access to new and emerging technologies for the attainment of sexual health and rights.
13. Programmes developed for men and young boys that work to eradicate violence against women and to contribute towards improved sexual health and rights for all.
14. Transformational programmes for stronger recognition of the importance of SRR among the media, the judiciary, medical fraternity, educational and health authorities, religious and cultural institutions.
15. Donors and development partners to invest in policies and programmes that promote an integrated, comprehensive response to SRHR within and aligned with the Maputo Plan of Action and the MDG'S.
16. We acknowledge and commit this conference to the youth statement as attached hereto.
17. All organizations present at this conference commit to the implementation and monitoring on this call to action and to reporting on it at the 4th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights planned for 2010.
18. The conference secretariat is hereby mandated to disseminate this ***Call For Action*** to all national and regional bodies and institutions including the African Union.

Abuja,

February 7, 2008

3rd Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights

Youth Statement

We, the youth advocates and activists from Africa interested in sexual and reproductive health and rights, have been actively participating these four days in the conference, in many ways.

You have seen us as presenters, volunteers, participants, facilitators, booth keepers. We are everywhere. First of all we want to thank the organizers for the willingness to put youth issues out there.

Great efforts have been done all over Africa to improve the sexual and reproductive health of young people. Saying this, we need to recognize that we still have a long way to go. Young persons are the ones facing the greatest challenges related to these issues. We initiate our sexual lives often without the necessary sexual information that can protect us from one of the biggest monsters of our generation, the spread of HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections. We, the youth of ages 15 to 24, are the ones most affected by the HIV pandemic. Young women are at a particularly high risk of contracting these infections; 60% of new HIV carriers are women. Women are also in danger of the Human Papilloma Virus, the cause of cervical cancer.

This is just one simple example of the importance to focus on material and human resources of activities that has the young population as their main target. But it is not enough.

We, the young people, are facing many situations that put us at higher risks. We initiate our sexual lives without any kind of sexuality education, which means, without any kind of information about contraception and condoms, knowledge about what an orgasm is, and how sexuality could be practiced without violence and enjoyed. Even worse at least 1 in 4 young women initiate their sexual lives in contexts of violence, and rape has become a weapon of war. We grow up in societies where men and women still face gender bias and discrimination, which promotes inequality and violence. This results in higher rates of the HIV pandemic among this population, adolescents getting pregnant at earlier ages, unwanted and forced pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and lack of access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.

We, the young people, recognize that some processes might take time, and that there are many challenges but the only thing we need is political will. We want to see changes now, not in 20 years, when we might be fighting with Aids, or with our adolescent children.

Our voices, all here together, demand action on these pressing issues in our lives:

- 1) Specific policies and programs, with enough human and materials resources, that are very clearly result-oriented.
- 2) Culturally specific disability and sexuality education
- 3) A focus on the needs of young people living with HIV/AIDS

- 4) Reduced unwanted pregnancies by increasing the access to contraceptive methods and emergency contraceptive pills, and the liberalization of abortion laws,
- 5) Curtailed sex trafficking
- 6) A recognition and inclusion of gay, lesbian, and transgender youth in planning and services
- 7) Eliminate harmful cultural practices such as female genital cutting/mutilation and early forced marriages
- 8) A campaign to criminalize perpetrators and provide support for survivors of rape, incest, and sexual harassment
- 9) Continued support of girl child education programs
- 10) Increased job training and placement support for graduates
- 11) Youth participation in planning, developing, and evaluating processes in all decisions pertaining to the welfare of young people

We, young people have come to the realization that to meaningfully participate in planning, developing, and evaluating processes in all decisions pertaining to the welfare of young people is to:

- Be active and knowledgeable participants by informing ourselves about laws concerning our well being
- Have our voices heard by having representations at appropriate levels of policy making
- Take responsibility for our actions and inactions
- Making improvements by taking result-oriented actions
- Involvement by contributing physically, socially and emotionally at all levels
- Devotion and rendering service
- Be better leaders by listening and sharing the knowledge we have gained

We understand that before us are stakeholders and people that believe in our capability. We rest assured that due consideration will be given to us and that our voices will not just be heard, but given considerable audience and lead to action.

Once again, we say thank you to the host of the Youth Sexuality Institute, Action Health Inc. and other partner organizations, stakeholders, distinguished personalities and everyone that has helped to make this institute a success.

Long Live Young People

Long Live Africa