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For Immediate Release

Governments Call for Women’s Human Rights, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Addressing Persistent Inequalities and Discrimination in CPD 47 Resolution

UN Commission on Population and Development Identifies Gaps in Human Rights and Health of Women and Young People

NEW YORK—The 47th session of the Commission on Population and Development ended early Saturday morning (12 April 2014) after a final all-night round of negotiations with a call from governments to promote gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as key priorities for sustainable development. The Commission urged world leaders to integrate these rights into the new development framework that will replace the Millennium Development Goals, which are set to expire in 2015.

The weeklong Commission was convened at the UN headquarters in New York to assess 20 years of progress since the groundbreaking agreements made at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994. At Cairo, 179 governments agreed that women’s health and rights—specifically sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights—must be central to global development policies, programs, and funding, and are the key to reducing the social and economic inequalities that exist worldwide.

“The right to control one’s fertility and sexuality free from coercion, discrimination and violence is fundamental to social and sustainable development. Governments recognized that lack of development cannot be invoked to justify the abridgement of human rights”, said Gita Sen of DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era). “We now need governments to act on their words by making these agreements integral to the post-2015 development agenda”.

Despite significant progress since Cairo, the Commission recognized that the global community has yet to fulfill the promise of equitable and universal access to quality, integrated sexual and reproductive health care services. To address these gaps, the Commission urged governments to expand access to confidential and non-discriminatory sexual and reproductive health-care services for youth and adolescents, including comprehensive, evidence-based education on human sexuality and measures to prevent and treat HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The Commission also called on governments to train and equip health-service providers to ensure that, in circumstances where abortion is not against the law, abortion is safe and accessible, and to intensify

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efforts to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support without stigma and discrimination.

To move the vision of Cairo forward, the Commission called on governments to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and to address persistent inequalities and “discrimination on any grounds,” including through the unfair and discriminatory application of laws. It further called on governments to establish affirmative action plans to promote the development of Afro-descendent populations and indigenous peoples.

The Commission also expressed deep concern about the pervasiveness of gender-based violence and reiterated the need to intensify efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence and harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Throughout the week, many governments expressed strong support for advancing the human rights of all to control all aspects of their sexuality, collectively known as “sexual rights.” In addition, 59 governments explicitly called for action to end discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The calls came from countries as diverse as the Philippines, South Africa, the Pacific Islands, Viet Nam, Nepal, Mongolia, Suriname, the United States, Australia, Norway, the European Union, and most Latin American countries. These calls build on similar agreements made during regional reviews of ICPD in Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia and the Pacific in 2013.

However, a striking lack of transparency and due process during the negotiations allowed a small group of conservative countries and the Holy See to block language on sexual rights in the final agreement. These same governments also made several vitriolic attacks on the role of civil society in a clear attempt to silence progressive voices. The move to block sexual rights elicited strong rebukes from many government delegations during the closing plenary: “Our governments will not be pushed backward for fear of accepting reality,” said the Philippines, while South Africa called for more “inclusive societies” and Norway stated that “discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity should not be tolerated in any society.”

Despite the fact that governments affirmed sexual rights in all three major regional Ministerial meetings in Montevideo, Bangkok and Addis Ababa on ICPD Beyond 2014 in September - October 2013, some delegations refused to accept inclusion of the term in the global agreement. This was especially ironic since the Addis Declaration, in particular, was further affirmed by African Heads of State in January this year. Nevertheless, the support for sexual rights expressed in the room was unprecedented, and marked an historical moment in the ongoing struggle for universal human rights.

Particular heartening was the support and indeed leadership from many Southern governments of countries big and small and from all regions, for sexual and reproductive

health and rights, and for the human rights of people discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

“The tide is turning in favor of a society that recognizes the fundamental human rights of all without distinction. From the proceedings during the week, it is apparent that most of the world’s governments from the North and South, find it unacceptable to tolerate violence and discrimination against people based on their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity; and that it is time for the world community to address this inequality.” said Claire P. Luczon of DAWN

Governments will reconvene in September at the UN General Assembly to renew political support for the actions required to achieve the goals of the ICPD Programme of Action. And much work is ahead for DAWN and our allies to ensure full integration of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the post-2015 development agenda.