

**Africa Regional Conference on Population and Development
Youth Conference – September 2013**

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I am so excited to be with you here in Addis, where together we will be helping to shape the future. We are here to demand that promises made 20 years ago in Cairo come to fruition.

But we must also encourage governments to *go beyond*, go beyond agreements of 20 years ago, to push further to ensure that the rights and freedoms of all people are respected and promoted—especially for the millions of adolescents and youth in our region.

I am here today in representation of the High-Level Task Force for the ICPD, which is co-chaired by former President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique. I joined the Task Force because it is unconscionable that our sisters and brothers in Africa, especially our sisters, continue to suffer in countless ways from the denial of their sexual and reproductive health and rights and freedoms. This is not the legacy I intend to you leave for my daughter, we can do much better.

Globally, and in Africa, sexual and reproductive rights and freedoms are curtailed by discrimination based on gender, age, marital, HIV, migrant and disability status, sexual orientation and gender identity, among other factors.

Communities living in poverty or otherwise marginalized, women, adolescents and youth, all carry the heaviest burden and suffer the greatest consequences of the failure to fulfill these rights.

Adolescent girls and young women are particularly disenfranchised. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of adolescent childbearing in the world—1 in 4 has a child before the age of 18.

Maternal mortality is a leading killer of adolescent girls in our region –including due to the unsafe abortions that kill 75 African women each day.

Adolescent girls -- even those who are married – are routinely denied access to contraceptives. And many adolescent pregnancies take place within the context of early or forced marriages, which rob girls of their basic freedoms to chart their own lives.

This is why we must push for our right to make decisions about our own health, sexuality, bodies and relationships-- without any form of discrimination, coercion or violence.

We must remind our leaders that these are fundamental human rights, and that they are universal. That means they apply to all, and they cannot be violated, under any pretext or grounds.

Some of our leaders, frankly, are still grounded in the world they grew up in and the traditions that shaped them. They need us to push them to do what is right in the 21st century.

We must begin by reviewing our laws and policies, as well as their enforcement, to ensure they promote and protect the sexual and reproductive rights of all -- regardless of age, sex, race, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, or any other factor including marital, HIV, disability or migrant status.