

High-Level Task Force for ICPD

RIGHTS, DIGNITY & HEALTH FOR ALL

PRESS RELEASE

Sexual and reproductive health and rights: Priorities for the ICPD Beyond 2014 and the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda

The High-Level Task Force for the ICPD calls on States participating in the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean to accelerate efforts for achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and young people and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

(Montevideo, Uruguay. August 13, 2013) Today, the High-Level Task Force for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) launched its policy recommendations in Latin America and the Caribbean, calling on the region's decision-makers to step up political will and investments for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, the rights and empowerment of adolescents and youth, and sexual and reproductive health and rights for all -- fundamental human rights issues, and also critical for sustainable development.



This call was issued at a press conference held during the Regional Conference on Population and Development, organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Government of Uruguay and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which brings together government officials from the region to review the progress made in implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development held in 1994 in Cairo, and to chart the way forward for the ICPD Beyond 2014.

The Task Force calls on governments to heed the following four key recommendations, urging their incorporation as specific objectives and targets in both the regional agenda for Cairo beyond 2014 and the new post-2015 global development agenda:

1. Respect, protect and fulfill sexual and reproductive rights for all - through legal and policy reforms and public education campaigns and community mobilization on human rights;
2. Accelerate universal access to quality, comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health information, education and services;
3. Guarantee universal access to comprehensive sexuality education for all young people, in and out of school; and,
4. Eliminate violence against women and girls and secure universal access to critical services for all victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

These priority recommendations for the way forward on the ICPD in Latin America and Caribbean were outlined by two Members of the High-Level Task Force: **Mariela Castro**, Director of the Cuban National Center for Sex Education, and **Alessandra Nilo**, co-founder and Executive Director of the Brazilian NGO Gestos, and Regional Secretary of LACCASO (the Latin American and Caribbean Council of AIDS Service Associations). Also joining the press conference were **Mirta Marina**, Coordinator of the National Program for Comprehensive Sexuality Education at Argentina's National Ministry of Education, and **Juan Camilo Saldarriaga** of the Asociación Demográfica Costarricense, Member Association of the International Planned Parenthood Federation.



Nilo opened by calling attention to some alarming figures. “Failure to fulfill sexual and reproductive health and rights in our region,” **Nilo** said, “has resulted in some stark realities.” She noted that every year in Latin America and the Caribbean there are 8,800 maternal deaths, most which are preventable; 23 million women want to prevent pregnancy but are not using modern contraception; and 4.2 million unsafe abortions are performed, leading to 1,000 deaths and one million hospitalizations, which cost over US\$130 million to the region’s health systems. In addition, 36% of the region’s women have

suffered some form of sexual and/or physical violence during their lifetime, mostly at the hands of their partners. And as in many regions of the world, it is often women and adolescents living in poverty, migrants, people of African descent, indigenous people and rural populations who face the greatest discrimination and suffer the most dire consequences of inequities and of not having their sexual and reproductive rights fulfilled.

Acknowledging the progress made in the region in implementing the ICPD and the positive impact it has had on so many lives, the Task Force presented its policy recommendations, based on an analysis of critical gaps and a focus on those ‘being left behind’.

First, the Task Force calls on countries in the region and the international community to adopt legal and policy reforms to ensure all people can enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights. These include ending impunity for all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual violence and femicide; ensuring all survivors of gender-based violence receive critical services, supports and access to justice, including post-rape care for all victims of sexual assault; removing barriers that prevent access to sexual and reproductive health services, such as parental or spousal consent requirements; eliminating early and forced marriage within a generation; ending unsafe abortion as a major killer of women and adolescent girls and expanding access to safe abortion services; and guaranteeing equality before the law and non-discrimination for all people, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. **Castro** strongly condemned discrimination and the lack of respect and tolerance for diversity, emphasizing that “as human beings we *all* have equal rights and deserve the same respect and ethical treatment, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.”

Castro and **Nilo** reflected on the havoc wreaked on women’s lives by the region’s strict abortion laws, which include, in some countries, putting women in jail for seeking life-saving treatment for complications from unsafe abortion and for undergoing illegal abortions.



The Task Force calls for the immediate repeal of laws that punish women and girls who have undergone illegal abortions, and for the revision of laws to make abortion safe and legal. **Nilo** pointed out that all too often, even where legal, abortion services, and even contraception, are difficult to access due to poor geographic distribution of providers, cost, discrimination and providers’ biases. Nearly sixty percent of pregnancies in Latin America and the Caribbean are unintended, and unsafe abortion is responsible for 12% of maternal deaths in the region. “These are issues of social justice and equity: Women who can afford to, find a way to get a safe abortion. Women and adolescents living in poverty are left to resort to life-threatening procedures,” **Nilo** said.

Nilo also called on governments to make good on their Cairo promise and accelerate universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and services for all people, which should be of good quality and affordable, respect human rights and place special emphasis on women and young people.

Castro emphasized the Task Force’s focus on fulfilling the sexual and reproductive rights of all adolescents and youth in the region – which at 26 percent of the population, form the largest cohort of young people in the region’s history. “Critical, in this region and worldwide, is ensuring universal comprehensive sexuality education for all young people, in and out of school”, **Castro** said. She highlighted the consequences of ignoring the sexual and reproductive rights of young people – including the fact that 20% of babies born in the region are to adolescent mothers; 250,000 young people are living with HIV; and up to 40% of young women report that their first sexual experience was forced.

“Sexuality education that is truly comprehensive can help our region put an end to the alarming rate of adolescent pregnancy, the spread of HIV and persistence of gender-based violence among our young people”, **Castro** continued, adding that “sexuality education does not corrupt our young people; it protects them. It doesn’t increase sexual activity, but empowers young people to take precautions.”

Mirta Marina of Argentina welcomed the recommendations of the High-Level Task Force, highlighting the progress achieved in her country. “Comprehensive sexuality education is about the right of boys and girls to receive this information in school”, she said, referring to one of the pioneering programmes in the region. “It goes hand in hand with other rights, such as the right to learn to take care of oneself and to take care of others,” she explained. “There can be no inclusiveness in our societies if we don’t take steps to make all forms of gender-based violence unacceptable, if we don’t achieve equality between men and women, if we don’t respect sexual diversity, if we don’t guarantee protection in the face of mistreatment and abuse, and if we don’t allow space for emotions and feelings,” she emphasized.



Juan Camilo Saldarriaga of Costa Rica noted that poverty affects 25% of young people in Latin America and the Caribbean, and some 20 million young people in the region are not employed nor in school.

The recommendations of the High-Level Task Force for the ICPD “are critical for furthering the human rights and the empowerment of the region’s young people,” **Saldarriaga** said. He called for the development of policies that will take full advantage of young people’s potential to create change in order to achieve a more equal and just world.

The Task Force conveyed a clear message to the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean: Almost 20 years after Cairo and as we approach the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, urgent action is required. Governments and international development partners must channel political will and resources to not only fulfill their longstanding commitments, but also to *go beyond* them to truly ensure the fulfillment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, in particular for people living in poverty, women, adolescent girls and young people. These investments are not only essential for the fulfillment of human rights, but they also have high pay-offs for progress on all other regional and global development priorities.

The High-Level Task Force’s full policy positions in a variety of languages and more information on its Members can be found on its website: www.icpdtaskforce.org, and on Facebook.com/icpdtaskforce and Twitter: @ICPDTaskForce. For more information on the Regional Conference on Population and Development for Latin America and the Caribbean, visit: <http://www.eclac.cl/>.

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