

# High-Level Task Force for ICPD

RIGHTS, DIGNITY & HEALTH FOR ALL

**PRESS RELEASE:**

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## **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for All: Critical for Progress on Cairo Conference Goals and the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals**

### ***High-Level Task Force for the ICPD Presents Policy Recommendations During Regional Review of the ICPD Programme of Action at the UN Economic Commission for Europe Meeting in Geneva***

**(Geneva, Switzerland — July 2)** The High-Level Task Force for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) issued a call to action at the European regional review of the ICPD Programme of Action, urging intensified political will and investments to make sexual and reproductive health and rights a reality for all. Members of the Task Force cited four key recommendations that representatives from governments in Europe and Central Asia should address as they review the ICPD Programme of Action in order to guarantee these fundamental human rights for all, advance gender equality, and the empowerment of women and young people. The call to action was issued in Geneva at the regional conference entitled *Enabling Choices: Population Priorities For The 21st Century*, organized by the UNECE and UNFPA.

“The ICPD Programme of Action originally envisioned that development will be achieved when all individuals have the information and means to decide on their sexual and reproductive lives free from violence, coercion and discrimination,” said Task Force Co-Chair and **former President of Finland, Tarja Halonen**, during her keynote address at the opening high-level plenary session of the conference. “While we celebrate the successes of the past 20 years, we must take note that too many women, young people and especially marginalized communities are being left out of the Cairo promise.”

“We need an even bolder vision today than the one put forth 20 years ago at the landmark Cairo conference,” stated **Renate Baehr**, Executive Director of the **German** Foundation for World Population and a Member of the High-Level Task Force for the ICPD, at a press briefing with three other Members of the Task Force. “There is ‘unfinished business’ in the Cairo agenda, with 800 women and adolescent girls dying needlessly every day due to pregnancy and childbirth-related complications. In Europe and Central Asia, access to quality sexual and reproductive health services is uneven, with marginalized groups — minorities, migrants, internally displaced people, refugees and Roma — facing the greater barriers. There are proven, cost-effective solutions, but governments must act, and act now.”

The High-Level Task Force for the ICPD is urging governments in Europe and Central Asia, and the world over, to heed its **calls for action in 4 key areas**, in order to ensure fulfillment of sexual and reproductive health and rights of all.

1. **HUMAN RIGHTS:** Respecting, protecting and fulfilling sexual and reproductive rights for all through public education campaigns and community mobilization on human rights, and legal and policy reforms.
2. **ACCESS:** Accelerated universal access is needed to quality, comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health information, education and services.
3. **EDUCATION:** Comprehensive Sexuality Education must be available for all young people, in and out of school.
4. **VIOLENCE:** We must eliminate violence against women and girls and secure universal access to critical services for all victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

“We must mobilize all sectors of society to create a supportive environment for the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights,” said **Sandeep Prasad**, Task Force Member and Executive Director of Action Canada for Population and Development, in Ottawa, Ontario, **Canada**. “That includes repealing the parental consent requirements for adolescent girls to access sexual and reproductive health services that exist in some countries, continuing our move towards ending discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, decriminalizing HIV transmission, and ensuring access to safe, legal abortion services. Young people must be guaranteed quality comprehensive sexuality education that goes beyond the basics of biology, to instill values of human rights, tolerance and non-violence. Failure to implement these measures amounts to grave social injustices that must be replaced with the guarantee of sexual and reproductive health and rights, which are fundamental human rights.”

“Unsafe abortion is a killer of women and adolescent girls and it continues killing in Europe because governments have yet to fulfill the promise made in Cairo to ensure universal access to quality, comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health information, education and services,” stated Task Force Member **Wanda Nowicka**, Deputy Speaker of First House of Parliament in Warsaw, **Poland**. “Deaths due to unsafe abortion are entirely avoidable. Abortion is actually one of the safest medical procedures. However, while abortion services are legal in most countries in the region, they are still not always accessible or affordable. We are concerned with the current trend to restrict access in some countries in the region.”

Task Force Member **Pinar Ilkkaracan**, co-founder of Women for Women’s Human Rights and adjunct professor at Bosphorus University in Istanbul, **Turkey** addressed the fourth action area — eliminating violence against women and girls. “Violence against women and girls is a global pandemic — one of the world’s most pervasive human rights violations. Nearly one-third of women in the world have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partners. Up to 30% of adolescent girls report that their first sexual experience was forced. Services available to women and girls subjected to violence are often scarce and limited, especially by comparison to the magnitude of the problem. This is not acceptable, and we must rectify this situation with the sense of urgency this human rights violation requires.”

The High-Level Task Force for the ICPD is an independent body providing a bold, progressive voice for advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights globally. It is comprised of government ministers, parliamentarians, academics and civil society leaders, and is chaired by former Presidents Tarja Halonen of Finland and Joaquim Alberto Chissano of Mozambique. The outcomes of this conference will contribute to a global assessment of the ICPD, influence population and development policy at the national, regional and global levels, and contribute to the global development agenda post-2015.

“The leaders at the UNECE have a choice to make about our future at this meeting—and it’s all about women and young people,” concluded Renate Baehr. “Sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the empowerment of women and young people, lie at the heart of sustainable development. These rights are as central now as they were 20 years ago, if not more so. If we shift our focus from women and young people, our future — *everyone’s* future — is diminished.”

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The High-Level Task Force for the ICPD position paper is available in [full-length](#) and [summary](#) versions in different languages.

*The High-Level Task Force for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was established in September 2012 as an independent body to provide a bold, progressive voice for advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, especially for those living in poverty and otherwise marginalized, and to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and young people. For more information, see <http://www.icpdtaskforce.org>. Twitter: [@ICPDTaskForce](#); [#ICPD](#); [#UNECE](#); [#ICPDBeyond2014](#).*

**For more information on the UNECE Regional Conference and the ICPD Beyond 2014 regional and global review process,** see <http://www.unece.org/population-unit/meetings-and-events/ageing/icpd/2013/icpd-2014unece-regional-conference/icpd-2014unece-regional-conference.html> and <http://icpdbeyond2014.org/europe>.