

Welcoming speech, Grace Wilentz and Jakub Skrzypczyk

Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, Ms. Anne-Brigitte Albrechten, Mr. Chairmen, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, youth delegates, good morning. On behalf of young people and attending the conference we would like to welcome you all in Geneva. We thank UNECE and UNFPA for hosting this conference and inviting so many young, dedicated activists.

My name is Jakub Skrzypczyk, and I am a member of the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights based in Warsaw, Poland, and this is my co-presenter, Grace Wilentz, coordinator of YouAct, based in Dublin, Ireland.

We, as young people and adolescents, want to have a strong say in making the decisions that concern our lives and bodies. ICPD+5 recognized the need to ensure youth participation and involvement at all levels of society, particularly in the development of policies and programmes which have a direct impact on us. Thanks to support from UNFPA and the Indonesian government, the Global Youth Forum was organized in December last year - the first conference in the ICPD+20 review process, where young people, having an ownership over the meeting, agreed upon a vision of how the world leaders should shape the international development agenda in order to put youth rights at the heart of development. Bali Declaration, the outcome document of the Global Youth Forum is a great road map for the way we have ahead of us. The priorities in the Bali Declaration are clear. We as young people and adolescents specified what needs to be done to fulfill our needs. The responsibility of delivering on the needs stated in the Bali Declaration lies not only on the UN but also all national states and governments. The Bali Declaration was revolutionary in several ways. It was the first real inclusion of young people in the ICPD review process, both because young people took part in all processes of the event itself, and because young people for the first time had their proper space in the ICPD process.

Now, we are in the last phase of the ICPD beyond 2014 Review Process that aims to look at the commitments made in Cairo. What is discussed here will be taken forward and feed in the Secretary's General report on the implementation of ICPD. Therefore it is extremely important for us to stress the most burning needs and issues that young people and adolescents still face all around the region.

Introduction to the calls to action

From the 30 to 31 May 2013, young people from across the UNECE region participated in a forum preceding this conference. We represented over 40 organizations, spanning the UNECE region, from Seattle to Bishkek and from Oslo to Tirana.

The outcome of this forum was the UNECE Youth Call to Action. Reaffirming and building on the Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration, the UNECE Youth *Call to Action*, identifies new and emerging issues facing the present generation of young people and adolescents throughout the UNECE region. It is worth noting here that the ICPD Programme of Action, also known as the PoA, is not only for developing countries, but applies to all countries in our region.

Through this call to action, we are highlighting issues that are vital to advancing the ICPD PoA over the *next 20 years*. At its heart, the *Call to Action* calls for the full integration of a rights-based approach to the ICPD Beyond 2014 and Post-2015 Development Agendas.

The document was developed through facilitated sessions on each of the 3 thematic areas to be addressed at this regional conference. In these sessions young people worked together to build consensus on *key priorities* for advancing the ICPD PoA **for adolescents and youth throughout our region**.

While youth unemployment is an issue of concern on everybody's lips, and is heavily reflected in the Regional Report, this is not the only issue of urgent concern to young people and adolescents.

The UNECE Youth Call to Action calls for an integrated, rights-based approach to addressing a full spectrum of issues; it represents a diversity of voices, including the voices of youth who experience marginalization along various and intersecting lines such as gender, disability, migration and refugee status, socioeconomic status and language; we experience marginalization for being young people and adolescents who are sex workers, living in rural and urban areas, living with HIV/AIDS, for our ethnic minority identities, and as young people and adolescents with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. 'Youth' are not a homogenous group and our diversities must be recognized if real progress is to be made on meeting our needs and realizing our rights.

Central to the UNECE Youth Call to Action are young people's and adolescents' calls on civil society, UN Agencies, academic institutions and most of all, on governments, to take concrete actions to realize the rights of young people and adolescents:

Put Youth Rights at the Heart of Development

Within the UNECE region, ratification and implementation of UN Conventions on basic human rights remains uneven. Violations of young people's human rights continue to be justified on the basis of cultural, traditional and religious values and practices. It is a matter of urgency for young people and adolescents in the region, that governments fulfill obligations to uphold our human rights; our Call to Action calls on governments to:

- Ratify international human rights conventions and harmonize national laws with the requirements of these agreements
- Governments must ensure that all population and health-related programmes and policies are human rights-based and centered on people, as opposed to targets; these policies must actively condemn all forms of sexual and reproductive coercion.
- Governments, Civil Society, UN Agencies and young people must work together to Develop and implement effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure young people and adolescents can report, and seek remedies and redress for violations of their human rights.
- Governments in the UNECE region must expand the protections currently provided for young people's rights by recognizing sexual rights as human rights.
- Finally, Governments in particular, must adopt a positive approach to sexuality, as necessary to securing our rights to privacy and bodily integrity.

Ensuring Access to Education, Including Comprehensive Sexuality Education with Strong Links to Accessible, Integrated to Youth Friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health Services.

Recognizing that sustainable societies rely on empowered individuals who are able to exercise their rights to obtain the highest possible level of health and education requires access to quality health services and education, which are universal and free of charge. Unfortunately, young people and adolescents in many countries in the region are denied access to comprehensive sexuality education, which negatively affects our lives and limits our choices. Furthermore, there must be strong links between comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services. The UNECE Regional report found that the existence of services is not enough, and that we must turn our attention to ensuring quality sexual and reproductive health services. The report recommended governments to partner with CSOs in improving quality in service delivery. We call on governments to:

- Respect, protect and fulfill our right to health in the full sense as defined by the WHO, which is not just the absence of illness, but a full state of physical, mental and social well being; Governments must ensure access to comprehensive, integrated, youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services.

- Governments must remove all structural, legal, policy, regulatory, and social barriers to realizing sexual and reproductive rights, including requirements for age of consent for medical services, and parental and spousal notification and consent.
- Governments must Implement national policies and programmes that ensure all adolescents and young people have access to comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health services, regardless of age or marital status, that respect our privacy, confidentiality and human rights.
- We call on governments to adopt laws, policies and programmes related to education that are in line with the international human rights framework, allocating sufficient budgetary resources for full implementation.
- Governments must prioritize evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education as an efficient and effective method of empowering us to make informed choices about our sexual lives, practice life skills and to explore attitudes and values.
- Respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of all young migrants, regardless of migrations status, paying particular attention to our right to health and our sexual and reproductive rights.
- Sexual and reproductive health services must, at a minimum, provide safe and legal abortion, maternity care, contraceptive counselling and a range of contraceptives including emergency contraception, and testing and treatment for HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Eliminate Risk of Unsafe Abortion to Young Women & Girls

Realizing the right of young women and girls to safe and legal abortion is crucial to ensuring we can obtain highest **attainable** standard of physical, *mental and social health*, it is also essential to reducing the health impact of unsafe abortion. Criminalization does not reduce the incidence of abortion, indeed, the lowest abortion rate can be found in Western Europe where abortion is broadly legal. However, criminalization of abortion does lead to increased risk of mortality and morbidity for young women and girls. Evidence shows that access to comprehensive sexuality education and a full integrated package of services are key to reducing unplanned pregnancies, however, women and girls in every country will always need access to safe and legal abortion services. Accordingly, we call on governments to:

- Respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of young women and girls, specifically our right to make free and informed decisions regarding our reproductive and sexual health and our right to bodily autonomy.
- National governments must respect, protect and fulfill our right to access safe and legal abortion services, removing all structural, legal, policy, regulatory, and social barriers to abortion services including mandatory waiting periods, and requirements for parental and spousal notification or consent.
- Governments must ensure that demographic targets are never used to justify limiting the sexual and reproductive rights and self-determination of women and girls, particularly when it comes to the issue of access to safe and legal abortion.

Eliminate Violence and Discrimination Against Young People and Adolescents with a Focus on Young Women and Girls, Young People Living with HIV/AIDS, Young Sex Workers and Youth with Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions

Discrimination experienced by young people is deeply rooted in patriarchal beliefs about the right of societies to control women's, **adolescents'** and young people's bodies, decisions and lives. These beliefs perpetuate inequitable socially constructed gender norms, stereotypes and violence,

which hinders individuals from reaching their full potential, and hinders development. In order to address the root causes of violence, we call on Governments to:

- Introduce and implement laws, policies and programmes to prevent violence against us based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual expression.
- Governments must Develop and implement laws and policies which take a zero-tolerance approach to sexual and gender-based violence, and recognize unsafe abortion as a form of gender-based violence.
- Governments must Guarantee access to justice for victims of violence, particularly sexual violence; and Eliminate all laws, policies and programmes that discriminate against us, including those that require or condone mandatory and coercive HIV, STI, and pregnancy testing, which violates our rights to bodily autonomy, to work, to education, and freedom of movement.

Guarantee Meaningful Youth Participation

The report on findings from the global survey in the UNECE region states that youth are rarely included as partners of governments.

- Governments must expand opportunities by creating enabling environments and integrate young people, especially young women and girls, into all levels of decision making structures.
 - Involving young people and adolescents, especially those who are traditionally marginalized, as equal partners in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes, is crucial for success, and for realizing young people's and adolescents' rights to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.
 - To my knowledge, none of the young people among us will be able to raise her or his voice within the Secretariat at this conference. A concrete way of involving young people meaningfully in this process would be to include them in the process of drafting the Chair's Summary.
 - Furthermore, specific marginalized communities are consistently excluded from these processes, with individuals who enjoy a greater degree of privilege speaking on their behalf. **However**, it's worth noting that we have the voices of people from marginalized communities, among the *youth* present at this conference. And we are eager to make ourselves heard.
 - To the Secretariat and conference rapporteurs: integrating the Call to Action into the Chair's Summary, the outcome of this conference, will send an important signal that young people and adolescents, their voices, perspectives, and contribution to the ICPD and MDG Review processes, are valued by Governments, Civil Society, UN Agencies and Academic Institutions in the UNECE Region.
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- On behalf of my co-presenter and myself, thank you for listening to our presentation on the UNECE Youth Call to Action. Integrating young people and adolescents into this Conference, as well as the ICPD Beyond 2014 process, is an important step in a larger process of guaranteeing meaningful youth participation and leadership in global processes.
 - The Call to Action was composed and unanimously agreed upon by youth from across the UNECE Region; despite the diversity of our experiences, and the differences between the contexts in which we live, we were unified in these calls and priorities for the ICPD over the next 20 years. Thank you.