

High-Level Task Force for the ICPD

Celebrating Cairo & Going Beyond

Side event 47th session of the Commission on Population and Development

**Speech by Wanda Nowicka, Member of High-Level Task Force
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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Cairo agreement led to many achievements, but it seems to have been slipping off the agenda.

Why? Because even though sexual and reproductive health and rights are so essential, many politicians don't like to talk about it. But we cannot achieve the MDGs, reduce preventable deaths, address population dynamics and environmental issues, and tackle inequalities, without addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights.

As parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to ensure laws, policies and budgets enable their fulfillment, not create obstacles and barriers. We must base public policy and legislation on science and facts, not ideology or misconceptions.

To this end, the Task Force calls for a range of legal reforms and practical measures, beginning with fulfilling the Cairo promise of ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and services. Budgets should not be a stumbling block - studies have shown over and over the cost-effectiveness of investments in this area.

But ensuring access also means removing legal and other barriers –including based on age or marital status, or requirements that women and adolescents get permission from spouses or parents; while ensuring that health providers comply with human rights, professional and ethical standards, and that personal biases do not get in the way of quality care.

A pressing priority is ensuring that all survivors of gender-based violence have access to critical services for their safety, access to justice, and health--including to post-rape care. This has been agreed across the ICPD review global and regional agreements, and also embedded in the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. I also would like to recall the groundbreaking resolution on Access to safe and legal abortion in Europe of the Council of Europe.

And if we want to get serious about saving lives and addressing social injustice, we need to tackle unsafe abortion, which kills tens of thousands of adolescent girls and women each year. And who does it kill? The young and the poor. Those who have the means can usually find a safe procedure, regardless of what the laws say. Meanwhile, women and girls suffering from botched abortions fill up to half of the obstetric wards in many hospitals, and

addressing complications drains health sector budgets. We need to treat unsafe abortion as the public health issue that is; end punitive measures that put women, girls and doctors in jail for seeking or giving life-saving care; and revise laws to expand access to safe abortion. And at a minimum, where abortion is allowed by law – the case in almost every country in the world – quality, affordable services must be accessible.

We need a range of other legal and judicial protections for the realization of sexual and reproductive rights that ensure, for example, that:

- No woman or girl is ever forced to marry.
- Gender-based and sexual violence is enforced as a criminal act to end impunity for perpetrators
- Pregnancy and motherhood are never justifications for women and girls to be forced out of school or a job.
- Consensual sexual relations among adults are not criminalized.
- No person is subjected to harassment or violence because they live with HIV, or because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, or any other factor.

Our responsibility is to guarantee equality before the law and non-discrimination for all people's rights. This is a basic pillar of the rule of law, democracy and progressive societies.

As policy-makers and parliamentarians, we must be held accountable for translating commitments into real change. And part of our task is ensuring that when sexual and reproductive rights are violated, we have mechanisms in place for them to seek redress and have justice.

All of these actions are needed to fulfill the fundamental human rights that Navi Pillay has spoken about so eloquently. I thank you.