



PRESS RELEASE

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Young People Call for End to Stigma Against Sex Discussions and Sex Education

BERLIN, September 1 — Widespread stigma against sex education and discussion of sexual matters must end if history's largest generation of young people is to achieve its full economic and social potential, young activists attending the Global Partners in Action conference agreed today.

At a day-long Youth Symposium prior to the Non-Governmental Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development, which convenes here on Wednesday, delegates under 30 called for a "cultural paradigm shift" in countries where taboos hinder young people's access to accurate and timely information about their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

They also called for new language for new messages on achieving sustainable development, protecting women's human rights and preventing HIV/AIDS infections and unintended pregnancies, and for more use of new technology to spread those messages.

"We need legal experts to fight for legislation in my country that will protect women and make sure sexual education is included in schools," said Ndebele Kuili, national director of the Children Human Rights Centre of Lesotho.

The 80 young delegates recommended that in assessing 15 years of work since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the NGO Forum should emphasize young people's right to be fully involved in government decision-making on policies that affect their lives. Young people coming into their prime reproductive years have real-life solutions to offer for current issues and deserve engagement in "unfettered dialogue" about them. Special efforts should be made to reach and involve out-of-school young people, the delegates said.

"With such an exchange, the ICPD Programme of Action becomes a living document that fully addresses young people's needs," said Imane Khachani, a member of the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, which sponsored the symposium.

The group discussed the fact that 11 percent of births worldwide occur among adolescent girls, who have low rates of contraceptive use. Half of the world's deaths from unsafe abortion occur among women under 24, and half of all new HIV infections occur among young people 15 to 24. As a result, the world's 1.5 billion young

people remain a key target for education and services to build their capacity as creative present and future leaders.

“This forum is important for today’s youth,” said Thoraya Obaid, executive director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, in remarks to the gathering, “but it is also very important for future generations.”