



**YOUTH RECOMMENDATION STATEMENT  
FOR SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHT**  
**The 9<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights**  
**27<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2017**  
**Halong, Vietnam**

**We, youth participants** of the 9<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health Rights (APCRSHR) come together to strongly insist that issues of young people are fully recognised. We urge everyone to work with us towards ensuring our sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

We are at a critical juncture for the SRHR agenda as the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Conference of Population and Development Programme of Action (ICPD PoA), is fast approaching. Although achievements in some areas have been made over the years, critical gaps still remain - including those pertaining to young people.

750 million young people from diverse backgrounds live in the Asia Pacific region[1]. Any action for or against their SRHR have significant impacts on societies as a whole. In attempts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ICPD must remain a cornerstone of our efforts, with young people at the centre.

### **Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)**

Young people face intersecting SRH challenges including high prevalence of early/unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, HIV, AIDS and STIs. Many of these poor SRH outcomes are direct consequences of inadequate access of youth-friendly health services and inaccurate information on safe sex and contraceptive use. Socio-cultural factors and laws and policies that limit young people's SRH continue to be significant barriers.

While many countries in the region have some form of sexuality of life-skills education, most are not comprehensive or rights-based. **Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)** has been proven not only to improve sexual reproductive health but also promotes gender equality and equitable social norms, but has a positive impact on safer sexual behaviours, delaying sexual debut and increasing condom use[2]. **Young people living with HIV and AIDS** is a growing problem in the region. As of 2016, there are 250 new HIV infections every day among young people in the Asia Pacific[3]. In order to curb this trend, implementation of CSE curricula is imperative.

**Access to youth-friendly health care facilities** play an integral role in delivering better SRH outcomes for young people. In many countries in the region access to sexual and reproductive health services are focused toward married couples. The legality of abortion ranges widely in many countries of the region however even in countries with liberal abortion laws, such as Cambodia India and Nepal, young women face obstacles such as finding providers willing to provide abortions, substandard conditions in health facilities and fear of stigmatisation of terminating pregnancy.[4]

## **Young people's sexual and reproductive rights (SRR)**

**Harmful traditional practices** such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage (CFEM), violence or murder related to dowry payment, son preference and “honour” crimes are prevalent in many communities and societies in the region and are part accepted cultural and religious practices. These practices are entrenched in deep gender inequality and systemic patriarchy. These violations are primarily toward and disproportionately felt among women and girls.

**Young People of diverse sexual orientations , gender identities and expressions (SOGIE)**, most especially, members of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI) communities, are currently facing violence, discrimination, physical and psychosocial pains, and even death based solely on who they are, how they express themselves in public, or whom they choose to love or be intimate with. Currently, SOGIE faces tremendous threats posed by governments and societies, through customs, norms, policies and laws. Issues related to LGBTIs still remain most controversial and taboo in most parts of the region. Homosexual conduct and activities are criminalised in 19 countries[5], and some have even criminalised cross-dressing. Bullying based on SOGIE in educational centres and institutions remain rampant [6]. Most transgender people in the region still cannot obtain identity documents that could give them legal recognition, which would lead them to claiming opportunities in education and employment. In terms of data, there are little to no studies on the situation of young LGBTI people in the region. Lack of data may lead to the limitation of basic services that could be provided to these young people at greater risk depression, suicide, substance abuse, and can have negative effects on their education.[7]

**Youth inclusive participation** is touted in international standards and commitments and now seen as a human right however, in the Asia Pacific regions, people under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions[8]. In a survey conducted by the UN IANYD in August 2012, highlighted that the main challenges for youth were limited opportunities for effective participation in decision-making processes. Although young people are disproportionately vulnerable and affected by HIV and other SRH related issues, spaces for meaningful participation for their SRHR are extremely limited.

## **Intersectionality**

Governments must recognise that young people who are poor, young people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities and expressions, young people with all forms of disability, young people living with and affected by HIV, ethnic minorities and indigenous young people, young people living in remote, rural and slum areas and young migrants, young displaced, refugees and stateless people face intersecting layers of oppressions and violence which are further conflated by poor SRHR.

**Young people living with disability**, like most people, can experience sexual feeling, needs and desires, however they receive little to no information on sexual and reproductive health. People

with disability are often subjected to discrimination and violence and their right to independence is frequently deprived. Within these struggles their sexual and reproductive rights are rarely touched upon. A study by UNICEF notes that adolescents with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and, in turn, to unwanted pregnancies and STIs, including HIV[9].

### **Young people living in humanitarian crisis**

The UN reported that more than 125 million people worldwide are in need of humanitarian assistance. Of those, a quarter are women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49. And one in five of these women and girls is likely to be pregnant[10]. Young people often represent a large proportion of those affected by humanitarian crisis. In some countries, two thirds of the population are under 25, and half of the world's out-of-school children live in conflict or post-conflict countries[11]. Basic needs such as safety and security, food and shelter, education and healthcare become the focus and SRHR are not consciously factored into addressing affectedness, rehabilitation or relief processes.

### **WE, YOUNG PEOPLE RECOMMEND:**

1. Empower young Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights advocates and invest in long term youth networks and programmes
2. Include all young disadvantaged and marginalised people, especially people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgenders, intersex and others (LGBTQIs) in discussion and designing in all spheres of development programmes, policies and laws
3. Implement laws that protect LGBTQIs from violence, discrimination and abuse, and ensure accountability at all times
4. Decriminalise abortion by holding governments accountable to international human right treaties, and commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action, ICPD and the SDGs
5. Promote and strengthen coordination and cooperation among different stakeholders including NGOs/INGOs/CSOs for inclusive gender responsive decisions regarding SRHR especially during humanitarian crises
6. Sensitise service providers, stakeholders and religious leaders by ensuring rights-based medical school curricula
7. Recognise the importance of CSE through evidence based knowledge on health, specifically reproductive health, HIV, unsafe abortion, sexual and gender-based violence
8. Ensure a multipronged approach to access and implement CSE which includes school education, peer to peer education, community-based, and ICT.
9. Ensure accessibility of SRH and HIV health services for all young people
10. Strengthen South- to-South partnerships among Asia and the Pacific countries to develop SRHR programme with the participation of young marginalised people
11. Ensure accountability and transparency in policy making and implementation including on provisions of services specifically related to child, early and forced marriage (CFEM)
12. Allocate budget for programmes for child brides to ensure their SRHR and empower them by creating income generating activities (IGA) and opportunities
13. Recognise young people's labour and Incentivise young people's work



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- [2] <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/03/comprehensive-sexuality-education/>
- [3] HIV and Youth : Regional Snapshot - <https://www.hivandiyouth.org/fact-or-fiction>
- [4] Guttmacher 2017 Factsheet: Abortion in Asia, accessed November 24 2017 [huffingtonpost.com/?icid=hjx004](http://huffingtonpost.com/?icid=hjx004)
- [5] UNDP, Leave no one behind: Advancing social, economic, cultural and political inclusion of LGBTI people in Asia and the Pacific, 2015, accessed 24<sup>th</sup> November 2017 [http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/library/democratic\\_governance/hiv\\_aids/leave-no-one-behind--advancing-social--economic--cultural-and-po/](http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/library/democratic_governance/hiv_aids/leave-no-one-behind--advancing-social--economic--cultural-and-po/)
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<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002354/235414e.pdf>
- [7] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health :  
<https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm>
- [8] Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle, A Good Practice Guide, UNDP, December 2012.
- [9] UNICEF (2011) Opportunity in crisis: Preventing HIV from early adolescence to early adulthood. New York: United Nations Children's Fund
- [10] <https://www.ippf.org/blogs/humanitarian-crises-are-not-temporary-nor-are-sexual-and-reproductive-health-needs>
- [12] <http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies>