

Time for world leaders to honour 25-year-old promises and renew their commitments on women's rights

OHCHR (11.11.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2X8Qilm> – The international community must prioritise women's rights to meet the promises and commitments on sexual and reproductive health made at a historic global conference 25 years ago, a group of United Nations human rights experts* has said.

A tremendous amount of work remains to be done to fulfil the ambitious commitments of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) which took place in Cairo in 1994, the experts said.

“We celebrate the important progress which has been achieved. However, 25 years later, we are far from realising the promise of the ICPD agenda,” said the UN experts, in a joint statement published as world leaders gather in Nairobi for a summit to mark the anniversary.

“We call on the international community to reaffirm unambiguously its commitments to fulfil the unfinished agenda of ICPD and increase its political will towards and investment on women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights. We call upon decision-makers to always put women's and girls' human rights at the centre of policy considerations and to meaningfully involve women and girls themselves in all

decisions affecting them.”

The experts highlighted major achievements including a notable fall of around 38% in the world’s maternal mortality rate between 2000 and 2017.

“Yet still more than 800 women are dying daily from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, many of whom are girls,” the experts said.

Action was also urgently needed on other reproductive rights, they said, despite the generally wider availability of modern contraception and progress on repealing laws criminalising abortion.

“Criminalising termination of pregnancy is one of the most damaging manifestations of instrumentalising women’s bodies and health, subjecting them to risks to their lives or health and depriving them of autonomy in decision-making,” the experts said.

“Twenty-five million unsafe abortions occur each year and some 214 million women are deprived of access to essential modern contraception, often leading to unwanted pregnancies.

“The persistent practice of child marriage in many parts of the world continue to lead to teenage pregnancy and the exclusion of girls from education and employment, hence limiting their enjoyment of many other rights,” the experts

added.

“The push back against women’s rights from religious fundamentalists and political conservatives that oppose women’s rights are particularly acute in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Despite States’ clear human rights obligations in these areas, the strong opposition discourse seeks to retreat from the ambitions of the ICPD agenda, challenging women’s right to equality and relegating a woman’s role to only the family and procreation.

“Without fully respecting and protecting women’s human rights, autonomy and decision-making over their own bodies and lives, we will not achieve the sustainable development goal on gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

The Nairobi summit, from 12-14 November, will be attended by heads of State, government ministers, members of parliament and many other groups and individuals interested in the pursuit of sexual and reproductive health and rights.