

24 May 2017

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General
World Health Organization
info@drtedros.com

Re: Welcome Letter from 122 Civil Society Organizations Worldwide

Dear Dr. Tedros,

We the undersigned 122 civil society organizations would like to congratulate you on your appointment to the position of Director-General of the World Health Organization, and look forward to a strong and continued collaboration with WHO. In honour of May 28, International Day of Action for Women's Health,¹ we come together as allied advocates, physicians, activists, and service providers to ask that in your role as Director-General, you support and advance all commitments to women and girls' health, particularly their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in order to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all people at all ages.

Ensuring SRHR has consistently been shown to result in positive health outcomes for women and girls, as well as greatly enhance their ability to contribute socially, economically, and politically to their communities.² Yet when it comes to achieving women and girls' full SRHR, much ground remains to be covered. Women and girls worldwide continue to face barriers such as inadequate sexual and reproductive health information and services; stigma and discrimination when attempting to access such services; parental and/or marital consent requirements; and restrictive abortion laws.³ In particular, we find it imperative to draw attention to the recent alarming rollbacks regarding women and girls' health and rights, such as the reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule by the Trump administration, and U.S. funding cuts to the UNFPA. These regressive steps only exacerbate the current context, undermine progress, and violate women and girls' human rights to information, health, bodily integrity, life, and autonomy in reproductive decision-making, among others.

¹ In 1987, women's rights activists declared May 28 as the International Day of Action for Women's Health, as a means to speak out on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) issues faced by women and girls all over the world. To learn more about the Day of Action visit may28.org.

² Center for Reproductive Rights and UNFPA (2013), [ICPD and Human Rights: 20 Years of Advancing Reproductive Rights Through UN Treaty Bodies and Legal Reform](#); Singh, Susheela et al (2014), [Adding it Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2014](#), p. 34.

³ DESA (2014), [Abortion Policies and Reproductive Health Around the World](#); Guttmacher Institute (2016), [Induced Abortion Worldwide: Global Incidence and Trends](#); Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, [A/HRC/32/32](#) (2016), Para. 60; Singh, Susheela et al (2014), [Adding it Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2014](#).

Restricting access to sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion, does not reduce the need for these services; rather, it only places these services out of reach, endangering the health and lives of millions of women and girls worldwide. Various international medical, public health, and human rights bodies, such as the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, have expressed concern regarding the direct relationship between restrictive abortion laws and the risks to the life, health, and wellbeing of women. Furthermore, there is strong evidence that the prohibition of abortion does not deter the practice, but rather results in women seeking clandestine and often unsafe procedures. Such unsafe procedures are often fatal and/or cause severe complications, in turn taking a heavy toll on healthcare systems in most developing countries, and further reducing the quality and accessibility of health services, as well as service providers' ability to provide quality care.

The Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda cannot be achieved without prioritizing the health and rights of women and girls, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In light of these recent backslides, it is imperative that you stand strong to achieve the following:

- Resist any attempted rollbacks on women's health, and ensure that women and girls' health and rights remain a priority
- Ensure that women and girls' health and rights, including their SRHR, are incorporated into strategies for achieving universal health coverage and access to healthcare
- Reaffirm and advance evidence- and rights-based commitments to promote physical and mental health and wellbeing, including universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services.

Sustainable development includes respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the human rights of all women and girls. As such, we urge you as incoming WHO Director-General to fully support, pursue, and defend a comprehensive approach to women's health, accounting for the full spectrum of women and girls' sexual and reproductive health issues, needs, and rights. We thank you and stand ready to work with you in this regard.

Sincerely,

Global Doctors for Choice
International Federation of Medical Students' Associations
International Planned Parenthood Federation
Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights

Endorsing organizations:

Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada
Advocacy, Research, Training and Services (ARTS) Foundation
African Youth Safe Abortion Alliance (AYOSA)
AIDS Foundation of South Africa
Associació Planificació Familiar de Catalunya i Balears
Association for promotion sustainable development
ASTRA Network
AWAZ Foundation Pakistan: Centre for Development Services
Beyond Beijing Committee
BOCS Foundation
Caribbean RHRN Platform
Carleton University, Ottawa
Catholics for Choice
Center for Reproductive Rights
Centre for Girls and Interaction (CEGI)
CHIRAPQ Centro de Culturas Indigenas del Peru
CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality
Clinica Medieg
CNS (Citizen News Service)
Coastal Development Partnership (CDP)
COMMUNITY AND FAMILY AID FOUNDATION
Community Initiatives for Development in Pakistan
Community Youth Development Foundation (CYDEF)
Consortio Latinoamericano Contra el Aborto Inseguro CLACAI
dance4life
Dandelion Kenya
DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era)
Echoes of Women in Africa Initiative
Elige Red de Jóvenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos A.C.
EMPOWER INDIA
EngenderHealth
Equality and Modernity Association
Equilibres & Populations
European Women's Lobby
Family Planning Victoria
FAWCO
Federation of Uganda Medical Students
Federation for Women and Family Planning
FEMNET
FGAE

Fortress of Hope Africa
Fundacion Arcoiris
Fundación Mexicana para la Planeación Familiar, AC MEXFAM
Fundación Oriéntame
Fundacion para estudio e Investigación de la Mujer
Generation Initiative for Women and network(GIWYN)
Global Media Foundation
Governance Links Tanzania
Groots Trinidad & Tobago
Inform Human Rights Documentation Centre
International Women's Health Coalition
Ipas
Ipas Ethiopia
IPPA of West Nusa Tenggara
IPPF MA of Armenia, Family Health Care Network NGO
Iranti-org
Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange
Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP)
Kazakhstan Association on Sexual and Reproductive Health (KMPA)
Khpal Kore Organization
Kobiety w Sieci
Krityanand UNESCO Club Jamshedpur
Kyetume Community Based Health Care Programme
MABIA-Ghana
Marie Stopes International
Medical Students for Choice
Naripokkho
NGO CSW LAC
Pakistan Parwan Alliance
Pakistan Rural Workers Social Welfare Organization
Pari o Dispare
Participatory Research Action Network - PRAN
Peace Foundation
PINSAN
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Planning Familial
Population Connection
Population Council
Population Foundation of India
Population Matters
Positive Women Inc. New Zealand

Radanar Ayar Association (Myanmar)
RedLAC México Latin America Youth Alliance
Regional Centre for International Development Cooperation (RCIDC)
REPEM Red de Educacion Popular de Mujeres
Reproductive Health Matters
Research, Training and Management (RTM) International
Right Here Right Now Bolivia
Rutgers
Samsara
SERAC-Bangladesh
Sex og Politikk
Sexual and Reproductive Justice Coalition
Simavi
Society for Education in Contraception and Sexuality (SECS)
Society for Feminist Analyses AnA
Society for the Advancement of People
Sustainable Health Development Center (VietHealth)
SUSTAINABLE RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION
The Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)
The People's Matrix Association
Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health (TICAH)
Tusitukirewamu Group Bwaise
Väestöliitto - Family Federation of Finland
Vanuatu Civil Society Alliance
VIETNAM FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION
WISH Associates
Women and Children First (UK)
Women Deliver
Women Empowerment Group (WEG)
Women's Promotion Centre (WPC)
World YWCA
Y-PEER
YouAct
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights
Youth Engage
YSAFE (Youth Sexual Awareness for Europe)
YWCA Netherlands