

Women's Major Group and Major Group of Children and Youth Joint Statement
Final Preparatory Committee meeting
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Distinguished Chair, Excellencies, Major Groups and fellow stakeholders,

I present this statement as a representative of the voice of young women and girls in the Pacific, and wider SIDS. With the SIDS conference soon at hand, we are determined in ensuring that our diverse voices will be heard, and that our concerns draw your close attention and action.

The significantly large and continuous growth of the youth population is not new to your knowledge - Young women and girls face intersecting and linked social, economic and environmental issues namely very high levels of sexual and gender based violence, gender based discrimination and other major challenges aggravated by high levels of economic, social and environmental injustice, made worse in times of climate change and natural disasters, environmental degradation or if already living in high poverty conditions.

We affirm that young people are mentioned in the zero draft merely in 18 and 46; however, it is indeed minimal - especially with specific regard to gender equality and the human rights of young women and girls. Women Major Group and Major Group of Children and Youth affirm paragraph 13 of the zero draft that the well-being and sustainable development of SIDS and their peoples depends first and foremost on national actions. However, without explicit regional and global attention, support, resources and focus steered towards young women, the well-being and sustainable development of our SIDS cannot achieve significant advancement and progress we need. We therefore call for the meaningful participation of young women from SIDS in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of all development goals, policies and indicators.

We also affirm paragraph 16, that the greatest natural resource of SIDS are the people. Young people in SIDS present a reservoir of immense resources in advancing just and sustainable development which can only be advanced, provided that development agencies and governments invest not only in formal and non-formal education inclusive of skills trainings and entrepreneurial skills, but also ensure high levels of diverse, quality, accessible opportunities for education, decent livelihoods and lifelong learning. We also call clearly for such systems to promote a gender equality focused, human rights based and violence free environment for young women and girls.

The way forward towards a sustainable future is surely through meaningful engagement of all sectors of society especially women and youth. Meanwhile young women and girls in SIDS and in other regions too, are almost entirely absent from local, national and regional decision making and leadership roles. The Pacific, for example, still has the lowest rate of women's representation in national legislature in the world. Therefore, the SIDS outcome document must specifically support temporary special measures and appropriate strategies to increase political and public participation and representation for all women at all levels of **society and** government, and including traditional governance systems. Additionally, specifically calling for SIDS states to provide young women and girls with quality capacity building and negotiation skills training and opportunities, to assist them to initiate social change through community-based work, advocacy, and meaningful participation in informal and formal decision-making bodies in the regions, and globally.

Youth unemployment rates are very high in SIDS, and unequally gendered social structures often mean that many young women are further hindered from entering diverse and non-traditional forms of work. So we affirm the development of innovative programs to address youth unemployment; with sustainable development programmes

that provide a wide range of opportunities for all young people to enter societal dialogue and policy discussion spaces, and to be part of volunteer and paid opportunities, and for States to increase the levels of genuine and resourced support for youth-led social organising in the SIDS regions, including by young women and girls, and in urban, rural and remote settings.

We also affirm paragraph 46 and actions proposed in 47; but further urge SIDS governments to take seriously their commitments to reform monetary, financial and trade rules globally in line with human rights obligations, in order to ensure adequate policy space at the national and regional levels to implement macro-economic policies and trade investment agreements, as well as gendered micro-economic, social and environmental policies to achieve gender equality, universal human rights and social justice for women throughout their life cycles, including diverse girls, young and older women.

We recognise that in SIDS states as elsewhere, it is still overwhelmingly women and girls who are occupied with unpaid and care work. In all island countries as elsewhere, the welfare and well-being of families and communities depend heavily on the resources, time and knowledge of women. It is a common pattern in the Pacific, for example, that young people do not move out of their parents or family homes when its time for university or have jobs as it is in many other countries throughout the world. It is also the case that elders remain within the care of their families, and that younger women are discouraged from leaving the family home until marriage. So the social care and unpaid roles of women and girls are life-long, full, time-consuming and largely ignored when nationally, regionally and internationally accounting for contributions to the society, the country, communities and families. We must change this.

Unemployed young women and girls are engaged in long hours and hard work of informal and subsistence activities as part of nurturing, reciprocity and service to their families; with little human rights protection. Many young women and girls are vulnerable to violence and discrimination, and neglect of their human rights including sexual and reproductive health and rights, which compromises and suppresses their capacities to participate effectively across all aspects of community life inclusive of cultural, political, economic and social spheres. In addition to actions stated in 45, we need to overcome the social, cultural and regulatory barriers that prevent young people from accessing youth-friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information, services and safe spaces, and instead develop comprehensive educational programs on the same, such as peer-to-peer mentoring. Physical health and mental well-being are necessary in building stable and healthy lives. Access to basic health care services should be made free and of good quality. We also need to strengthen regional healthcare networks through better policies which will ensure recruitment, development, training and maintenance of our health workforce."

Women Major Group and Major Group of Children and Youth therefore call for strong and explicit text throughout the outcome document on universal human rights protection, gender equality, women's human rights and empowerment, including in the Preamble and operational sections. We call for your support in this today.

We also call for young women and girls involved in precarious unpaid and care work to be recognized and valued in the socio-economic development framework, especially when there is still no adequate international human rights framework that offers young domestic care workers protection. We also call for our governments to provide access to entitlements from central or local government social support resources, for young women and girls who are involved in full time care-work. We need to have in place progressive state policies to advance gender equality and the rights of young women and girls, and for all women throughout their life cycle.

We also urge governments to consider both targeted and universal social floor and social protection measures for young women and girls including but not limited to young women with disabilities, young women living with HIV/AIDS/STIs, young women and girls with non-heteronormative sexual orientation and gender identity, and all others.

In recalling the thematics of the 3rd Global SIDS Conference priorities, achievements are not possible in any of the 6 thematic areas if they do not facilitate genuine partnerships and networking by and with young people, given that such relationships must be founded on justice, transparency and accountability of all stakeholders. They must also explicitly prioritise advancement of gender equality, women human rights and empowerment throughout our lifecycles.

In light of this, I close by commending the current partnerships that are enabling SIDS young women in their participation in sustainable development. The Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance is a network of young women leaders of local, regional, and international organisations working with and for young women across the Pacific region with state and non-state and UN allies. The alliance is an effective intervention to mobilise and facilitate engagement of young women and girls in consultations and meaningful dialogues that bring to light pressing issues of young women and girls and determine the way forward. Noting also the Pacific Council with its focus on internal development of young women leaders in existing youth-led structures and networks, and work of feminist groups such as DAWN, Code Red, FWRM, Diva for Equality and others that ensure that young women are engaged in increasing areas of political analysis, advocacy and movement-building.

Finally, young women of SIDS affirm our power as decision makers, implementers, change agents, partners, and leaders of today and the future. In the spirit of equality, justice, partnership, sustainable development, and democracy, We call upon our leaders to reflect our concerns in the 3rd Global SIDS Outcome Document, and ensure our needs and concerns are fully reflected during the upcoming SIDS conference in Samoa.

Fa'afetai, Thank you.