

Rights must be at the centre of the Family Planning Summit: Civil Society Declaration

We, civil society organizations working to promote women's and young people's human rights, call on world leaders on the eve of the "Family Planning Summit", hosted by the UK Government and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to ensure that sexual and reproductive health and rights are at the centre of all efforts to meet reproductive health needs, including family planning.

Contraceptive information and services – "family planning" – form an essential part of the health services that women need throughout their lives. Any steps to increase demand for contraceptives must actively support efforts to improve comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health. Contraceptives must be provided through primary healthcare, with full regard for women's human rights and the specific needs of young and unmarried women and other groups.

Our experience, built over decades of work around the world, has taught us that the failure to take actions guided by women's human rights – to health, to life, to live free from discrimination among others – can have devastating consequences. Policies that accept or tacitly condone forced sterilization, the coercive provision of contraceptives, and the denial of essential services to the young, poor and marginalized women that need them every day have violated, and continue to violate, women's human rights.

Nearly twenty years ago, governments at the International Conference on Population and Development agreed that respect for women's reproductive autonomy is the cornerstone of population policy. Any return to coercive family planning programs where quality of care and informed consent are ignored would be both shocking and retrograde. The Family Planning Summit must ensure that the clocks are not put back on women's rights: women's autonomy and agency to decide freely on matters related to sexual and reproductive health without any discrimination, coercion or violence must be protected under all circumstances.

In order to expand contraceptive access with full respect for women's human rights, we urge governments, donors and other actors supporting the Family Planning Summit to:

- Take all possible measures to ensure that this initiative is designed with quality of care and human rights at its core, so that no coercive measures are introduced in the provision of contraceptives;
- Ensure that meaningful participation by women, including young women, is built into all stages of program design and implementation to ensure that services are responsive to their needs and to prevent any human rights violations;
- Ensure that the provision of contraceptives is integrated into existing and new sexual and reproductive health services, and that a full range of contraceptive methods is offered;
- Design and implement a system for monitoring, evaluation and accountability to track and measure its impact on the rights of women as this initiative is rolled out, and urgently make necessary corrections should violations come to light;
- Commit to tackling the existing legal and policy barriers that hinder access to contraceptive information and services, without which efforts are likely to be ineffective and exacerbate disparities in access.

In 2012, nothing less will do.

Endorsed by:

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