**ICPD Beyond 2014**

**Caribbean Forum on Population, Migration and Development**

**Civil Society Statement**

**Presented by Dona Da Costa Martinez, Trinidad and Tobago Family Planning Association**

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The organizations and networks from the English, Dutch, Spanish, Creole and French speaking Caribbean comprising representatives of Civil Society Organizations, including women, men, youth, persons living with HIV, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), sex workers, MSM, Indigenous, tribal and persons with disabilities, Faith-Based Organizations and other networks throughout the Caribbean region engaged with ICPD Beyond 2014, gathered in Ocho Rios (April 2012) and Le Resouvenir, East Coast Demerara (July 2013) recognize the gains that have been accomplished in partnership with Governments and key national and international stakeholders:

We the above referenced organizations and groups, welcome the opportunity of this gathering to review progress achieved in the implementation of the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 20 years on, and to strengthen the linkages between the ICPD objectives, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the New Development Agenda post 2015.

As you deliberate on the outcome of this important meeting, we urge you to take into account our recommendations, primarily in relation to Sexual and Reproductive health and Rights; Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment; Adolescents and Young People’s Sexual and Reproductive Rights; and the effects of internal and international migration on the Caribbean.

**ACHIEVEMENTS and CHALLENGES**

**In the areas of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights we note that we have :**

Improved on HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention programs which have helped decrease the prevalence rate; the contraceptive prevalence rate has gone up and several governments have taken on their responsibility to provide SRH services and do so free of charge in several instances. While progress has been made in reducing the level of maternal morbidity and mortality, it remains unacceptably high in several countries.

Twenty years later, we ask why access and quality of SRH services remain inadequate and a challenge for populations such as the elderly, the LGBT, indigenous, adolescents and young people, and people living with disability. We also ask why there remains insufficient championing of sexual and reproductive health and rights in our region, with the exception of a growing LGBT rights group. Of special concern is the fact that the conversation around sex and sexuality is approached from an apologetic stance as if it was taboo, thus creating an atmosphere of negativity around the issue, when sex and sexuality are integral to life and being human.

**With regard to Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment**

We compliment countries that have endorsed and are implementing CEDAW, Belem do Para, the ICPD Program of Action, the Beijing Plan of Action and other major international instruments which have contributed to the establishment of policies and legal frameworks for the prevention of gender based violence including sexual violence. However it is unacceptable that the Caribbean registers one of the highest rates of sexual violence in the world.

We acknowledge that some countries have established national machineries such as gender bureaus which have helped promote gender equality and women’s rights. We acknowledge the strides in women representation and participation in decision making processes. With regard to maternal morbidity and mortality however, while progress has been made in reducing levels, it remains unacceptably high in several countries.

**In relation to Adolescents and Youth,**

While we welcome the decrease in the adolescent fertility rate, current levels of teen pregnancy remain unacceptably high. Also, we acknowledge that while insufficient and needing to be scaled up, the development of youth friendly spaces has been essential in the delivery of information, education, counseling and services on sexual and reproductive health. We note that several governments have adopted the Regional Curriculum Framework and are implementing Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) programs. While we believe that this is an entry point to the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education, HFLE remains deeply inadequate to meet the needs of adolescent and young people in relation to sexual and reproductive health.

Of real concern is the fact that child marriage continues in some countries with deleterious effects on the life of the young girl, not limited to aborted education, poor mental and physical health outcomes including compromised sexual and reproductive health and rights. We are also concerned about the male perception of limited economic opportunities which results in high drop-out rates of male students from the educational system and contributes to under-representation of male students in schools and to other social problems.

Of concern also is the criminalization of the boy child when he engages in sexual activities with girls under the age of 16.

**Migration**

With regard to migration we are particularly concerned that the brain drain depletes the skills base in the region which compromises sustainable development. We are also concerned that undocumented migrants, especially sex workers (male and female), domestic workers, refugees and asylum seekers do not have equal rights and access to social services such as health including sexual and reproductive health and rights , education, housing and employment, which has implications for the standard of living of the population as a whole.

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

In an effort to address the severe implementation gap in relation to the ICPD commitments and other international conventions and the real challenges and gaps in relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights gender equality and women’ empowerment, adolescent and young people sexual and reproductive health and rights, and migration, we urge you our governments to prioritize the following:

**Sexual & Reproductive Health and Rights**

* Increase and accelerate universal access to comprehensive, integrated and quality sexual and reproductive health services, counseling and information for women, adolescents and young people, persons with disabilities, LGBT, Sex Workers and Indigenous population - with respect for their human rights, and with an emphasis on equity and respect for diversity.
* Address legal anomalies including those related the age of consent to sex and the age at which sexual and reproductive health services can be accessed without parental consent.
* Reaffirm that sexual rights are human rights and adopt a universal definition of Sexual Rights to guide policies and actions at country level.
* Determine the causes of high levels of maternal mortality in countries where it exists, when 85% of births are attended by skilled service providers.
* Repeal laws that restrict access to safe abortion services and introduce legislation whereby women can have access to safe and affordable abortions.
* Repeal punitive laws that criminalize adolescent sexuality; sodomy, cross dressing and LGBT relations
* Enact and implement laws and policies that protect and promote the rights of marginalized populations such as LGBT and people living with AIDS.
* Create a structure whereby national networks of CSOs will be formed to make SRHR recommendations that would feed into the national health plans allowing for a basis a for regular discourse within the networks and for monitoring of progress made by government in meeting international commitments.
* Collect, disaggregate analyses, disseminate and translate data into strategic information to inform policy formulation at all levels.

**Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment**

* Re-establish the CARICOM
* Women’s Desk and strengthen national women’s departments as robust and well-funded mechanisms for the development, promotion, monitoring and evaluation of policies and plans of action for advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment throughout the Caribbean
* Establish comprehensive units fully trained and equipped to address the diverse needs of survivors of gender based and sexual offences
* Take action to ensure that men and boys recognize and act on their obligations to prevent and end violence against women. Any effort to involve men and boys in curbing violence against women should not be done to the detriment of programmes for women and girls.
* Promote women’s leadership in all decision making processes, including meeting the MDG recommended minimum quota of 30% in Parliament.
* Facilitate the meaningful participation of CSOs especially sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as women’s rights organizations in the design and implementation of programmes.
* Urge governments to develop and/or revise national policies for - gender equality, gender/domestic violence policies, sexual and reproductive health & rights, child marriage - taking into account new developments and changing paradigms.
* Ensure the development and implementation of national and regional communication strategies to address issues of GBV and Sexual Violence, and Sexual and Reproductive Rights
* Institute national and regional policies to end human trafficking

**With regard to Adolescents and Youth**

* We urge governments to adequately address the employment needs of youths through the provision of comprehensive and innovative programmes which equip youth with the life skills that allow young people to contribute to the development of themselves, their family and the wider society.
* Amend national building codes to ensure safe and easy access for the disabled to sexual and reproductive health service delivery sites.
* Decriminalize adolescent on adolescent consensual sexual activity by reviewing and amending existing legislation and policies.
* Review best practices in the region and to adopt such practices wherever possible.
* Create and enforce comprehensive sex education, commencing from the elementary school levels, which address the sexual rights and needs of the disabled and the LGBT youth community.
* Amend laws and policies that will lead to increased and accelerated universal access to comprehensive, integrated and quality sexual and reproductive health services (including safe and comprehensive abortion services), counseling and information for adolescents and young people, with respect for their human rights, and with an emphasis on equity and respect for diversity.
* Ensure the involvement of the young people (including the disabled and the LGBT youth community), in the planning, designing, and implementation of SRH interventions aimed at addressing the SRH needs of *all* young people
* Collect, document, and use disaggregated data by gender and age
* Ensure the availability of continued education to teens throughout pregnancy.
* Encourage leaders, artists, sportspersons, media persons to deliver positive messages and denounce behaviours such as intergenerational sex, including incest, on adolescents, and to serve as positive role models to adolescents and youths.
* Train, monitor and evaluate health care providers and educators with respect to the delivery of youth friendly sexual and reproductive health information, education and services for youths, inclusive of the disabled and the LGBT youth.
* Effect behavioral change through collaborative approaches that involve faith based organizations, other civil society organizations, governmental agencies, and private sector organizations.

**Internal and International Migration**

* Promote universal access to health care services including sexual and reproductive health services, regardless of migration status
* Create better condition for people to pursue quality lives in their countries including: competitive remunerations, health services, quality education, housing and access to quality basic needs.
* Conduct research to determine the effect of remittances on family and country economies.

Thank you for your attention!