

Oral Statement to be submitted to the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women at the 15th Year Review of the Beijing Platform for Action, by non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Americans for UNFPA, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA), Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE), Center for Reproductive Rights, Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), Equidad de Genero, Ciudadania, Trabajo y Familia – Mexico, Fundación para Estudio e Investigación de la Mujer (FEIM), German Foundation for World Population (DSW), International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), Ipas, Population Action International, Population Services International, Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU), Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) - NEW WAYS, World Population Foundation

Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives to address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health issues (strategic objective C.3)

Fifteen years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, where the international community reaffirmed women's human rights and the importance of sexual and reproductive health, access to prevention information and services remains an urgent issue for women and adolescent girls.

Female and male condoms are the only effective dual protection methods available that prevent HIV, sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), and unintended pregnancy. To advance the Beijing Platform of Action and achieve Millennium Development Goals 3, 5, and 6, both female and male condoms must be well-programmed and accessible to all people who wish to use them. This means female condoms must be made as available as male condoms and promoted equally in the fight against HIV and STIs.

Female condoms, moreover, are of vital importance in that they offer women a tool to initiate protection and to negotiate condom use. Despite their significance for women's health, rights, and empowerment, female condoms remain underfunded, largely inaccessible, and underused because of a lack of political will and effective programming.

As we build upon commitments made to achieve universal access to reproductive health (MDG 5b), let us commit to the following action steps as we work to fulfill the MDGs and advance the Beijing Platform for Action:

- Expand access to female and male condoms by dramatically increasing funding for their purchase, distribution, and program support; and redouble efforts to alleviate high per-unit costs to consumers, especially for female condoms
- Ensure comprehensive, rights-based programming to facilitate female and male condom uptake and sustained use
- Involve civil society, especially women's groups and women living with HIV, in female and male condom policy and program decision-making, implementation, and monitoring

- Invest in research and development of woman-initiated and controlled prevention methods, such as additional types of female condoms, microbicides, and vaccines

Female and male condoms are essential in stemming new HIV infections and promoting good sexual and reproductive health. Furthermore, female condoms are a critical, gender-sensitive prevention tool that must be made more widely accessible. We must act now to ensure that women and adolescent girls have all the information and methods at their disposal protect themselves and lead healthy, productive lives.