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Statement submitted by International Federation of Medical Students’ Associations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations welcomes and affirms its priority theme on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

A quarter of a century ago, the world held its breath when, in Beijing, the iconic declaration affirmed for the first time, internationally, that women's rights are indeed human rights. Many of us, the young people, were born around the time this commitment took place. We celebrate the global milestone of the twenty-fifth anniversary. We know well that in our future careers implementation of women's rights, including sexual and reproductive health, will be a crucial aspect of the well-being of the patients we shall care for.

Looking back, we acknowledge the significant progress achieved toward women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, but today, we can no longer afford to be modest in our demands. Even 25 years later, we still witness a daily reality where 25 million unsafe abortions take place each year, endangering the health and lives of women and girls worldwide.

For women and girls, having full autonomy over their bodies and making their own decisions relating to when and how many children to have is a human right. For communities worldwide, it must become a collective priority to ensure safe avenues for them to enact this choice. We recognize access to safe and legal abortion as an empowerment of women to their universal right to health and well-being.

Knowing that almost every abortion death is preventable through access to family planning services and provision of safe abortion, we have a duty to act now. Legal frameworks or administrative barriers, such as the necessity for spousal or parental consent, often limit seeking out safe abortion. Other obstacles, such as financial restraints and societal stigma, have an equal part in preventing women to seek the needed service. Thus, to fully exercise reproductive rights of women, safe abortion must be included as part of national Universal Healthcare Coverage agendas.

Therefore, we call on you, leaders of Member States, to:

- Implement an evidence-based and health-focused approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights, while acknowledging the autonomy of women regarding sexual and reproductive decisions without contributing to current stigmatization.
- Make safe legal abortion universally available, accessible, and affordable for all women and girls to minimize unsafe abortions, together with its consequences.
- Stand against and work to repeal laws that criminalize abortion, and remove barriers on women's and girls' access to safe abortion services.
- Recognize access to safe abortion as an essential part of sexual and reproductive health and rights service of the Universal Healthcare Coverage.

A core element in realizing women's rights in health is family planning. Currently, there is a high unmet need for services and products supporting family planning around the globe. In developing countries alone, about 214 million women of reproductive age seeking to avoid pregnancy do not use modern contraception or any at all. This gap in services often correlates with a lack of implementation of other tools to promote development, such as access to education. This is one of many examples affirming the intersectional role that family planning plays with other sectors in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

We must remember that the core realization of reproductive rights begins from comprehensive sexuality education for everyone, which empowers adolescents and supports them in autonomous decision-making over their own bodies, including those related to family planning and access to safe abortion. For health systems to do its part on the women's rights agenda, it is high time to recognize sexual and reproductive health services as a crucial part of Universal Healthcare Coverage on the national level, providing services such as contraceptive counselling and contraceptives provision, as well as fertility treatments. It is imperative that no one is left behind, including young people; unmarried people; the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual+ community; people living in rural and remote locations; and people from a low socioeconomic background.

With our full commitment to Universal Healthcare Coverage, we call on the Member States to:

- Adopt legislation to ensure equality of access to a broad range of contraception and other family planning methods and services, including fertility treatments, regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.
- Invest in effective preventive measures, including comprehensive sexuality education and full access to family planning services, and to all modern contraceptive methods to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies.
- Recognize family planning services as an essential part of sexual and reproductive health and rights service of the Universal Healthcare Coverage.
- Pro-actively involve youth in all decisions relating to their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and foster meaningful youth engagement at all levels of governance.

We, the youth, vow to do all in our power to keep up with this momentum and to be a part of the healthcare workforce as human rights leaders. We can do so, however, only if you Member States are on board with us “to advance the goals of equality, development, and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity”, which governments emphasized in Beijing 25 years ago. We shall all put all hands on deck to build a better future for women and girls and the world. This can only be achieved when every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, and every newborn and child are healthy.