

Gulalai Ismail's Statement in the General Assembly Interactive Hearings

Excellencies, distinguished delegates and participants!

My name is Gulalai Ismail, and I am a Gender Equality activist from Pakistan

Young People particularly women and girls are disproportionately affected by gender inequalities and discriminatory social norms across the globe. Young people age 10-24 represent over one quarter of the global population but exercise limited autonomy over their own lives and bodies. There are over 60 million girls married before their 18th Birthday, 16 million girls age 15-19 giving birth every year. Every minute a young woman is newly infected with HIV, 21.6 million women and girls undergo unsafe abortion worldwide, and 47,000 women die because of those complications. Every year around 300,000 women die because of pregnancy related complications, one mother dies every 2 minutes; 99% of them living in developing countries. Women who don't have access to reproductive health services are at greater risk of death and complications than women who do have access to reproductive health services. Girls under the age of 20 are twice more likely to die in childbirth than those in their 20s. Therefore, making sexual and reproductive health services accessible to young women and girls should no more be a political warfront, it should be the utmost priority of all states because these states have committed to the right of life of every human being through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Without making Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and choices available and accessible to women and girls we cannot dream of eradicating poverty; to end poverty we have to invest in each and every person of the world-as the post 2015 development agenda is about universality and by burdening half of the world's population with reproductive health issues by limiting their access to reproductive health services we are denying half of the world the right to live a decent and healthy life; a life of their choice. Religion, culture, and state sovereignty should no more be an excuse to deny women and girls access to sexual and reproductive health services.

35% of women worldwide have experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their life time. Globally as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by their intimate partners. The social and economic costs of intimate partner violence are enormous and have rippled effect throughout the society. The agenda of poverty eradication is incomplete without committing and taking actions to end violence against women and girls, without making the world a safe place for women. And we know that, till date many countries don't have laws and support systems against domestic abuse and this declaration and Sustainable development goals should drive us towards it. I believe, the world does not lack resources to prevent women from vulnerabilities, it lacks political will to do so and the declaration should aspire states to take responsibility for protecting women against violence.

Another important area to emphasize in the declaration and the SDGs is the participation of young women and girls in the governance. Young women and girls despite being vital stakeholders in driving change, face discrimination in process of active decision making and accountability, they encounter multiple barriers including gender, social and political factors. A vacuum of voices of young people going unheard exists. Through the declaration states should commit to create conducive environment and

mechanism which ensures young women and girls are politically empowered, take part in governance at all levels and their voices are heard in political decision making. We, the young women are not voiceless, we are silenced systematically.

As an activists working at grassroots level for improving lives of young women, I recommend that the language of the declaration should be strong, should keep young people especially young women and girls in its center, should prioritize financing goals on women empowerment and gender equality, and should be a driving force towards building mechanism for holding states accountable. The economic cost of inequalities is high, so we need to invest more in women, girls, and equality for eradicating poverty and for achieving the goal of a decent, developed and peaceful world.

In conclusion, the SDGs should speak to all people from all genders, ages, cultures and ethnicities. Human Rights and equality should be the larger framework of the declaration, and should recognize young women and girls as partners in development.