

RESURJ's public statement on CPD 47.

April 17th, 2014

## **20 Years after Cairo: Women: Continue to reproduce but never mind about Sexuality**

*Reflections from feminist activists across generations and from around the globe*

Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ) has been working hard since 2010 to advance global health and population policies to consider women's and young people's autonomy over their sexuality, and not merely their reproduction, as critical to realizing human rights, social justice and development objectives. In the last four years, we have seen the landscape of global feminism working on sexual and reproductive health change leadership, generations, politics, and strategies. We feel triumphant at having shaped the spaces where we work and engage, even if governments haven't changed theirs.

The 47<sup>th</sup> United Nations Commission on Population and Development ended early Saturday morning, April 12<sup>th</sup>, with a reaffirmation of the Cairo Programme of Action, including a recommitment to continue placing women's and girls' reproductive rights and their sexual and reproductive health at the center of population and development. The Commission also expressed deep concern about the pervasiveness of gender-based violence and reiterated the need to intensify efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence and harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

The Commission further called on governments to address persistent inequalities and discrimination on any grounds, including through the unfair and discriminatory application of laws. In this regard, it committed to establishing affirmative action plans to promote the development and protect the human rights of afro-descendants and indigenous peoples. These are all important advances, and we will continue to demand accountability for their realization.

RESURJ members are extremely disappointed, however, that the Commission failed to agree on ensuring access to safe and legal abortion and to ending multiple and intersecting forms of violence against people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). Nepal, India and Cuba tried to champion the removal of abortion restrictions by taking steps to review laws that punish women for

undergoing illegal abortions, and more than fifty nine countries<sup>1</sup> called for ending violence based on SOGI specifically. Moreover, many governments expressed strong support for advancing the human rights of all to control all aspects of their sexuality, collectively known as “sexual rights.” These calls, both to recognize “sexual rights” as such, and to end gender based violence and discrimination based on SOGI, were omitted from the final text.

The leadership of the Commission’s Bureau was questionable; to put it mildly, and there was complete lack of transparency and due process during the negotiations, which allowed a small group of conservative countries to block language on sexual rights in the final agreement. The absence of sexual rights from the text elicited strong rebukes from many government delegations during the closing plenary: “Our governments will not be pushed backward for fear of accepting reality,” said the Philippines, while South Africa called for more “inclusive societies” and most Latin American governments stated that “in order to fulfill social justice and human rights in development, the sexual and reproductive rights of all individuals must be protected and fulfilled”. The support by many for enshrining sexual rights at the United Nations was unprecedented, marking a historical moment in our joint struggle for achieving justice for all.

To us, it is clear that the Cairo @20 process has failed not only us, but all women and girls. Women’s sexuality continues to be stigmatized, oppressed, and considered “dangerous” to the prevailing patriarchs who are in power. Unsafe abortion is still a leading cause of maternal mortality and morbidity. It is still a social justice demand for billions of mostly poor, young, and disadvantaged women. Access to safe abortion “where legal” is no longer sufficient. Hundreds of women are being imprisoned in Latin America for terminating their unwanted pregnancies, and their health and lives are at risk. Abortion is not a crime and no woman or girl should be punished for it. The attempt by the few governments that tried to push for this language was quickly dismissed or unsupported by the majority in every region. This goes to show that the political will for guaranteeing women’s reproductive autonomy is still severely lacking. It is shameful that in this day and age, with the technologies that we have, women still dying every day.

But not all is lost... We will continue to struggle in our own communities and countries to speak truth to power. We will continue to fight until *all* women- in its entire list - poor, rural, urban, living with HIV, lesbian, trans, bi, disabled, indigenous, afro-descendant, dalit, sex worker - are free, making free and informed decisions

---

<sup>1</sup> Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Viet Nam, Republic of South Africa, Suriname, Uruguay, USA, the European Union and the Pacific Islands.

about our bodies, claiming our rights, and having equitable and non-discriminatory access to all the health, education, and legal services we need and which are our human rights.

---

[\[1\]](#)