



THE WATCHDOG

The Youth Coalition's Quarterly Newsletter

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BUILDING BRIDGES

Pamela Pizarro, Editor



The Youth Coalition recently held its first ever International Young People's forum in Buenos Aires, Argentina from May 16th - 20th. The forum brought together youth from around the world to discuss relevant issues in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights. As well the forum took a look at 4 Millennium Development Goals that are important to youth issues; Goal #2 - Achieve Universal Primary Education, Goal #3 - Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, Goal #5 - Improve Maternal Health, Goal #6 - Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases. Since this is the year to review how far the international community has come in reaching the Millennium Goals the Youth Coalition wanted to help youth come together to work on a youth declaration, effectively analyze and critique the goals, and suggest ways in how the goals can be reached by involving youth in the process.

We also would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our hard working participants, facilitators, and logistical staff for helping to make this event such a success. Keep a look out on our website for the Forum's final report as well as other relevant resources.



Working Internationally for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

CONTACT US!

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Member's Profiles



Stavros Voskakis, 24, lives in Athens, Greece. He is a health visitor and works in a family planning clinic in Athens. Stavros has been a board member of the Hellenic Family Planning Association for the past 3 years and is the coordinator of the association's Youth Group. As well he is a member of the Hellenic Federation of Paediatric & Adolescent Gynaecology and the European Society of Contraception (E.S.C). Stavros hopes to one day start his own research company.

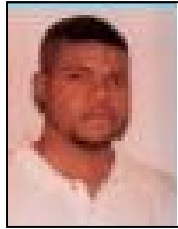
Agniva Lahiri, 25, a transgender youth activist and the coordinator of Network of Asia Pacific youth is a Student at the University of Melbourne. S/he is studying sexual culture and its relevance in the area of HIV intervention and prevention program. Agniva Coordinates the Global network of Sex worker living with AIDS Asia Pacific office where s/he is targeting and highlighting the issues of prostituted youth living with AIDS community. S/he was also associated as a consultant in UNCEF ROSA and produce report on child participation in South Asia. S/he has also worked as a resident consultant for south Asia in Gender and AIDS Training Institute (GATI) AP.





Il suffit...

Lorsqu'une année referme ses portes
 Pour se perdre dans l'éternité
 Lorsqu'à l'horizon se pointent
 Les premières lueurs d'une année nouvelle
 Lorsqu'après une nuit agitée se perçoivent
 Les premières senteurs d'une douce aurore
 Lorsqu'après une jeunesse mouvementée
 On se retrouve aux portes des enfers



Tresor Kasia,
 Democratic Republic
 of Congo

On réfléchit...

On réfléchit sur ce qui a été
 On réfléchit sur ce qui sera
 Moi, j'ai réfléchi sur toi
 J'ai réfléchi sur notre amour
 J'ai réfléchi sur notre folie

J'en suis désespéré...

*Il suffit souvent d'un « Oui »
 Il suffit souvent d'un « Non »
 Une toute petite décision
 Pour changer le cours d'une vie*

*Il suffit parfois d'un « Oui »
 Il suffit parfois d'un « Non »
 Une toute petite distraction
 En l'espace d'une seule nuit*

Tu sais, j'ai beaucoup pensé à toi ce soir
 Jamais je ne m'étais senti si près de toi
 Jamais je ne t'avais sentie si loin de moi
 Moi, si près de toi dans mes souvenirs
 Toi, si loin de moi dans l'autre monde
 C'est fou...

Je suis retourné là-bas, ce soir
 A l'endroit où nos corps ont dansé
 Au rythme de l'amour
 Là où nos deux âmes ont vibré
 Dans un élan d'exquise volupté

Tout était au rendez-vous...
 Les arbres immobiles comme des statues historiques
 La rivière tumultueuse comme une symphonie magique
 La lune silencieuse comme un témoin discret

Tous étaient au rendez-vous
 Tous. Sauf toi...

Sauf toi...

*Il suffit souvent d'un « Oui »
 Il suffit souvent d'un « Non »
 Une toute petite décision
 Qui peut changer toute une vie*

*Il suffit parfois d'un « Oui »
 Il suffit parfois d'un « Non »*

*Un petit moment de distraction
 En l'espace d'une seule nuit*

Je me suis souvenu de ce soir-là
 Tu étais belle dans ta robe de soie
 Et moi, un peu extasié par l'alcool
 L'obscurité nous enveloppait de sa couverture
 On n'avait pas de préservatif

Mais, ce n'était qu'un plaisir à la sauvette
 Que cela pouvait-il faire ?
 Puisqu'on se connaissait depuis des mois ?
 Alors, pour une fois, sans préservatif
 On s'était vite décidé

Je m'étais vite décidé...

Pourtant, toi, tu as quitté ce monde
 Aujourd'hui, on me dit que je suis atteint
 Alors, j'ai pensé à toi
 J'ai pensé à ce soir-là
 J'ai pensé à cette décision-là

D'abord, je suis resté sans voix
 Puis, amèrement, j'ai pleuré
 J'ai pleuré ma vie
 J'ai pleuré ma jeunesse
 Si seulement je m'étais protégé !

Repose en paix, chérie...

Maintenant, je me pose des questions
 Comment un si petit moment de plaisir
 Pouvait-il gâcher toute une vie ?
 Comment une si brève étreinte
 Pouvait-elle faucher à fleur d'âge ?

Oh, je sais !

Je sais que ma vie ne sera plus
 Ce qu'elle était auparavant
 Mais qu'importe, je vis et c'est l'essentiel
 L'essentiel, c'est que j'ai compris
 Quoi qu'un peu tard...

J'ai compris qu'...

*Il suffit souvent d'un « Oui »
 Il suffit souvent d'un « Non »
 Une toute petite décision
 Qui change le cours d'une vie*

*Il suffit parfois d'un « Oui »
 Il suffit parfois d'un « Non »
 Une toute petite distraction
 En l'espace d'une seule nuit*

« Ce recueil a été conçu essentiellement dans le but de sensibiliser les jeunes contre le VIH/SIDA »



HIV/AIDS and Muslim Women

Saskia Hüsken
The Netherlands (working in Cameroon)

What if you are a Muslim woman living with HIV? This is the underlying question of the training video "*Sexual and Reproductive Health, HIV/AIDS and Women in Islam*" from the African Forum of Faith-Based Organizations in Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS. The video tackles the challenges that Muslim women in Kenya and South Africa face in dealing with HIV/AIDS and I use the material a lot in my trainings in Cameroon, with VSO-volunteers and local organizations (from different religious backgrounds).

HIV/AIDS is a worldwide problem, touching upon all communities from all religions. Women from Muslim communities who are living with HIV often face extra severe challenges, due to discrimination from people in their own communities. First of all, there is denial that HIV/AIDS also exist within Muslim communities, resulting in a huge silence. Under this silence there is a lot of stigma and discrimination, stemming from the fact that some Muslim leaders have the strong believe that HIV is a curse from God. What sexual and reproductive health choices do women have in the light of the Qur'an? Islamic tradition stresses the obedience of women to the men in their lives, and this can limit a woman's ability to make her own sexual and reproductive health choices. Yet, the Qur'an outlines that women have the right to well being. Regarding contraceptives, the Qur'an states that you cannot use a method that interferes sexually with a woman and her partner, so automatically, condoms are not allowed. Women from the South African organization Positive Muslims have a more liberal interpretation and believe couples can use the methods that are available now; "In times of the Prophet, for transport, the use of camels was prescribed, but does that mean that in these modern times we are still only allowed to use camels for transport?" Fatima Noordien, Progressive Islamic Scholar, agrees that it would be untrue to say we cannot use modern techniques, because the Prophet did not prescribe them.



Muslim women living with HIV stress the importance of getting tested and knowing your status. If you test negative, you know how to protect yourself and remain free from infection. If you test positive, you know where to go for support, live positively, and prolong your life. Support groups for Muslim women living with HIV/AIDS have started in Kenya and South Africa. They start income generating activities to keep the women busy, and the support group also functions as a place for the women to share ideas and experiences and find comfort and relief again in their religion. The most important message is that women do have choices; the choice to say no to sex, the choice to determine how many children they want, the choice in using the type of contraceptive they want, and the choice of questioning religious and cultural practices. Fatima Noordien states, "Women should stop being victims of patriarchy. Stop allowing men to make the decisions for you and interpret your fate for you. Start realizing and reading the Qur'an and see what power it gives us, how it enables us rather than disables us. We need to become much more critical and we need to become readers. We need to argue our case and we will take back the power that men have over determining what expression we as women can give to our religion."

From whatever religion or background, every woman should be encouraged to use the possibilities and strengths of her religion, to gain control over her own life. Because she has the choice, because she has the right!



Es lo Interior lo que cuenta

Amanda Ahumada, Chile

En los últimos años en el occidente ha existido una especial preocupación por los derechos sexuales de la mujer, relacionados con la violencia, valga la redundancia diferentes violaciones con definiciones que varían a la tradicional, incluyendo esta y otras como la violación dentro del matrimonio el “date rape”, es derecho de la mujer a decidir en forma asertiva sin tomar en cuenta previas acciones o conductas si desea o no tener relaciones sexuales.

Sin desmerecer las anteriores y tantas otras, creo que hay un tema de creciente preocupación ya que no tan solo no es tratado como un tema de agresión hacia las mujeres sino que se ha incorporado a la cultura popular como normas aceptables.

Esta es el utilizar el cuerpo de la mujer como símbolos de objetos sexuales, del “deber ser”, llevando a las mujeres a “querer ser”.

Lo anterior no sería de tan alta gravedad si los parámetros fijados para estos objetos sexuales, “mujeres físicamente perfecta”, fuese alcanzable al menos para una porción razonable de las mujeres, pero al no serlo a llevado a la creación esporádica y creciente de enfermedades con síntomas físicos y psicológicos auto- inflingidos en su mayoría, en donde algunos ya comienzan a ser más aceptados socialmente. (ej. La anoréxica si se ve “bien”)

- Anorexia
- Bulimia
- Abuso de medicamentos anorexígenos
- Abuso de diuréticos
- Abusos de laxantes
- Exceso gimnasio y abuso de sustancias relacionadas
- Auto mutilación
- Incapacidad de lograr goce sexual relacionado a vergüenza del cuerpo
- Incapacidad de disfrutar ocasiones sociales debido a sentimiento de incumplimiento con expectativas sociales corporalmente
- Temor a probar nuevas actividades que revelan el cuerpo ej. Natación
- etc.

Dentro de estos intentos violentos por calzar con el prototipo que exige la sociedad, varios, tales como, la bulimia, anorexia, auto mutilación y abusos de diferentes sustancias químicas pueden llevar a daños físicos irreparables y hasta la muerte. De igual forma los daños psicológicos pueden llevar a una vida de infelicidad y al suicidio.

Luego ante esta violencia activa de la sociedad sobre nuestro cuerpo hemos de ser pro-activas, no dejarnos definir y definámonos como mujeres bellas cuya sexualidad no sea definida por nuestro exterior.

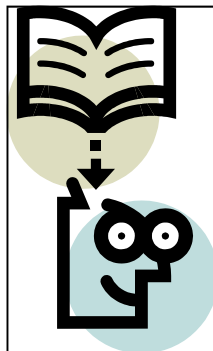
Somos bellas, pero no somos objetos y sobre todo debemos utilizar el poder de la palabra y de nuestra imagen que nos han quitado y hacer una reingeniería que no nos dañe ni física ni psicológicamente.

NO A LA VIOLENCIA!

SEXUAL HEALTH AND YOUTH In GREECE

Stavros Voskakis, and
Nikolaos Salakos, Greece

Sexuality is undoubtedly an integral part of the human existence. From time to time, a lot has been said about sexuality and the biases that surround it. *What do young people believe? What are their opinions about sexuality, sex, and sexual behavior?* A lot of qualitative (focus group discussions, in-depth interviews), and quantitative (in form of questionnaires) research has dealt with this serious subject.



A research project, “Sexual health and Youth”, was undertaken by the Hellenic Family Planning Association in collaboration with the Division of Family Planning of the Second Department of OB/GYN at the University of Athens. Seeking to find specific answers to several questions dealing with youth and sexuality they handed out questionnaires to 300 individuals aged 16-25 years old. They were to answer the question “Where do young people get information about sex?” 81% answered that they get information from their friends, 44% answered that they rarely got information about sex from their families, and 69% answered that they never get advice from the church. In the question “Which are the most important subjects that concern sexual and reproductive health?” 87% consider Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS to be the most important, 64% answered unwanted pregnancies, 65% believe in the importance of pregnancy, and 75% consider the sexual and reproductive health and rights. For the final question “In your opinion which from the services below are more important?” 86% answered that a great deal of importance is to be tested for HIV, 79% considered availability to contraception to be important, 77% the examination and the treatment of STIs, and finally 75% emphasize the importance of a pregnancy test.

The existence and maintenance of sexual health in young people is not so easy to deal with. However, the achievement of this aim is of essential importance if we want them to have a healthy life and afterwards as time goes by healthy and happy family.



Do we need to radicalize not only our politics but also our methods?

Svenn Grant, Trinidad and Tobago

It is clear that our recognition for having political power is virtually non-existent. We aren't the owners of the means of production, a large proportion of us are not eligible to vote in the democratic political systems of our respective countries (this does mean that voting really empowers anyone) and hey we're young. Unfortunately we have a clear record of participation in the adult world. Our labour is exploited, we are markets for consumption (ironic when we are economic slaves), we are tried as adults in the justice system and generally under funded in the arena of education and health. I guess we are all equal, but some are more equal than others. And when this pig mentally persists in the minds of rich and those given power by them, the circumstances may not be inevitable but there will always be a response.



Our labour is exploited, we are markets for consumption (ironic when we are economic slaves), we are tried as adults in the justice system and generally under funded in the arena of education and health. I guess we are all equal, but some are more equal than others. And when this pig mentally persists in the minds of rich and those given power by them, the circumstances may not be inevitable but there will always be a response.

Higher crime rates, lower rates of meaningful employment, more humans living in poverty, women's work is under paid, over-population, no safe reproductive health services, high rates of HIV/AIDS, little access to effective prevention and treatment, an environmental catastrophe, and few sustainable economic structures. All of these and more make up the social challenges of this colder than Patagonia world, that the economic structures have violently imposed on us; the general masses.

There has also been another response; young people have been most interested in the traditional forms of protest. We have seen in our generation movements for trade justice, environ-

mental sustainability, anti-war and anti-capitalism/imperialism. But what about Sexual and Reproductive Rights? It is critical that we ask ourselves why we have not been able to have a true sense of community that reflects activism against all oppression. In 1994, Nelson Mandela made a clear point of noting in his inaugural speech that ending apartheid also means ending discrimination against homosexuals.

One of the few positive aspects of the infamous Millennium Development Goals is that it has been targeting the economic development minded world to explore a multi-faceted approach to development. This being an approach that includes human and environmental development approach. Indeed the approach does leave a lot of room, may be too much, for interpretation. Especially when our colleagues have already worked their butts off on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Women's Rights, and developing our sexual and reproductive health rights through the ICPD process.

The challenge for us now is to ask ourselves, how long will all this go on before we acknowledge that this is a state of emergency? And if we believe this neglect is a crisis, then this calls for a crisis intervention. Should we hold signs with messages of "will have sex for my sexual rights?" Does anyone want to join me in a fake blood bath exercise; spraying red paint on world leaders of any kind that ignore these rights we have negotiated for? I don't want to seem to extreme, but it seems that until we start getting arrested for what we believe in, we would really move the progressive agenda forward.

Prateek Suman and others participating at our Youth Forum in Buenos Aires, May 16th—20th, 2005



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Beijing+ 10 en América Latina y el Caribe: Los derechos de las mujeres son apoyados por consenso

Gabriela Cano Azcarraga, Mexico

Durante el 10, 11 y 12 de junio del pasado 2004 se llevó a cabo en la Ciudad de México la Novena Conferencia Regional sobre la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe.

Esta reunión a cargo de la CEPAL es la culminación de un proceso regional desarrollado a lo largo del 2004 en el que se celebraron reuniones sub-regionales (en febrero, la región de Centroamérica se reunió en Tegucigalpa, Honduras y el Caribe en San Vicente y las Granadinas y en marzo América del Sur en Brasilia, Brasil). En dichas reuniones se analizaron las necesidades de las mujeres y se elaboraron recomendaciones y evaluaciones sobre el cumplimiento de las Naciones de la región a los acuerdos internacionales relativos a los derechos de las mujeres y muy especialmente de los avances relacionados con la Plataforma de Acción de la Cuarta Conferencia Mundial de la Mujer.

SUCEDIÓ ASÍ:

- Tras la aprobación del Consenso de México, una aclamación de gozo y esperanza fue emitida desde los corazones de todas las personas presentes. Representantes de gobiernos, activistas y demás asistentes aplaudieron e hicieron exclamaciones de alegría por más de 3 minutos.
- La Delegación de EUA, como ha sido su costumbre en los procesos regionales en los que ha participado en los últimos 2 años, emitió comentarios fuera de lugar y que demostraban su profundo desconocimiento de la realidad de la región, su desinterés mejorar la vida de las mujeres y su falta de compromiso por los derechos humanos en general. En ésta reunión la delegación norteamericana estaba presidida por Ellen Sauerbrey.
- La fiesta de clausura fue celebrada con música de *mariaquis* pero el verdadero festejo lo incitaron las jóvenes activistas quienes se apoderaron del "suelo" para bailar y felicitar a delegados/as que demostraron compromiso y apoyo a los derechos de las mujeres
- Las y los delegados escucharon las voces de mujeres jóvenes y adultas plasmadas en una Declaración producto de solidaridad entre ONGs, el mensaje fue emotivo, memorable, honesto, franco e inspirador.

De la 9ª Conferencia Regional surgió un importante documento conocido como el "Consenso de México", que fue aprobado unánime y emotivamente por los países de la región participantes.

El Consenso de México exhorta a los gobiernos a que desarrollen e implementen mecanismos para combatir la pobreza, mal que afecta gravemente la vida de las mujeres, también les exige que actúen con prontitud y con verdadera voluntad política creando y fortaleciendo las medidas para prevenir, diagnosticar y dar tratamiento a ITS, especialmente al VIH/SIDA así como a garantizar que todas las mujeres, sin discriminación alguna por cualquier condición o circunstancia, tengan acceso a información y educación en materia de sexualidad y reproducción así como a servicios preventivos y de atención a la salud sexual y reproductiva.

En el Consenso de México también se abordaron temas como la *violencia contra las mujeres* en cualquiera de sus formas (violencia familiar, explotación, acoso y abuso sexual, tráfico y/o trata de mujeres, jóvenes y niñas, la prostitución forzada, las violaciones y los asesinatos sistemáticos, entre otras...), el derecho de las mujeres a *la participación plena e igualitaria* en todos los espacios de la vida social, incluidos los lugares de toma de decisiones a nivel gubernamental y los *derechos humanos de niños, niñas y adolescentes*.

El Consenso también aborda un aspecto importante y es que exige a los países garantizar recursos financieros y humanos así como reforzar su capacidad política e institucional para el cumplimiento de los acuerdos internacionales y regionales relativos a la promoción y protección de los derechos de las mujeres y es igualmente relevante que el Consenso de México solicita a los gobiernos de la región que no lo han hecho, ratificar y aplicar la Convención sobre la Eliminación de todas las formas de Discriminación contra la Mujer (CEDAW) y su Protocolo Facultativo

El Consenso de México que fue aprobado por aclamación por todos los países que participaron en la reunión y que es el aporte de América Latina a procesos internacionales como el de revisión a 10 años de los avances de la Plataforma de Acción de Beijing, reitera la importancia de que se implemente la Plataforma de Acción de Beijing, el Programa de Acción Regional para las Mujeres de América Latina y el Caribe, y el Plan de Acción de CARICOM. Así mismo, ofrece una visión complementaria indispensable a los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio.

el Caribe, y el Plan de Acción de CARICOM. Así mismo, ofrece una visión complementaria indispensable a los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio.



AFRICA: The Misunderstood Land.

Edford Mutuma, Zambia

"No, Africa is not a country"; "Yes, we do have cars"; "Not everyone lives in mud huts";

"Yes, Charlize Theron and Dave Matthews are real Africans"

Welcome to a day in the life of an African living in the Abroad! Over the years, an abundance of these and many other shockingly ignorant and bewildering questions have led me to ask myself, why is Africa so grossly misrepresented in the USA? When Will Smith returned from filming Ali in 2001, he went on American TV and explained how he felt duped and misinformed when, upon arriving at Jan Smuts's airport, he found that the Africa he had been taught in school and seen on TV was NOTHING like what he had come to experience first hand. Like Smith, many westerners who do finally set foot in Africa, fall head over heels in love with her beauty, hospitality, and splendor, and most continue to return. "A piece of your soul stays in Africa", explains Michael, an Attorney in Atlanta, Georgia.

As many Africans in the abroad will tell you, we often find ourselves going on the defensive, trying to speak up on behalf of a continent which, though burdened by its fair share of turmoil and strife, is by far the most beautiful and spiritual places on earth. We have found ourselves indignantly whipping out photo albums to show them our beautiful lush homes, our hypnotic Jacaranda trees, the awe-inspiring Table Mountain and the majestic Victoria Falls. Many Africans find themselves having to explain certain attributes about themselves, as if being African renders them unworthy of these qualities. A close Zimbabwean friend of mine was recently branded a pariah in his workplace after an exchange he had with one of his new African American colleague, "You're from Africa? Wow, I am surprised you speak such good English!" the American quipped. To which my proud friend retorted, "I am surprised you speak proper English too!" Another South African acquaintance found he had to prove he is a 'real' African simply because he is white.

Frustrated by these and many other incidents, I set out on a quest to unravel this mystery and get to the bottom of this misinformation. Surely we cannot lay all blame at the foot of the mass media machine...or can we? Over the course of a week, I took to the streets and randomly picked 10 Americans from different walks of life and asked them each 4 simple questions:

1. What 2 words spring to mind when you hear the name Africa?
2. Name 5 African countries
3. Name 2 positive things you associate with Africa
4. Would you ever visit Africa? If not, why?

What I unearthed was a vacuous, narrow-minded viewpoint, which left me even more baffled than when I began. All 10 of my respondents named AIDS as the word that immediately sprung to mind when they thought of Africa. The other common words were: civil war, famine, female genital mutilation, Mandela, slave trade, and wild animals. When it came to naming countries, the most common were Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, Nigeria, and Liberia, (sprinkled with a misguided Guyana here and Chile there!). Most struggled to name 10. The positive (surely something good has come out of Africa!) they thought, were; the Lion King (I'm serious!), Ancient Egypt, Mt Kilimanjaro, preservation of wildlife, and the beautiful African women. One "enlightened" African American actually said (to my face), that slavery was a positive thing because without it, he'd still be living in Africa "without running water or toilets". The majority was nonchalant about visiting Africa, with several saying that despite Africa's strife, they consider a visit to Africa to be a pilgrimage, which every black person should make at least once in their lives.

Honestly, I was hurt! I felt as if they had insulted my family. I wanted to tell each one of them how sad and misguided they were...how disappointing it was that they saw the world through such shortsighted lenses. How infuriating it was that people in Africa strive to emulate the American culture and idolize American celebrities, yet they in turn could not look past a biased news report, documentary or "Save the Children" food drive, complete with fly infested, snotty nosed, malnutrition babies.

But then something dawned on me...WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO REPRESENT AFRICA? I realized that as long as we allow other people to tell our stories and comment on our issues, we shall forever be branded and placed into a box which best suits them. I cannot be angry with these people; it's not their fault. Because too few of us have stepped forward and tried to tell our positive, inspiring, and diverse stories we have been relegated to the notions and opinions of someone else. Once I realized that I had the power to change the negative perception of Africa, I felt positive and empowered, and hopeful that one day the world would come to view Africa, and Africans as the multi-dimensional and majestic people that they are.

If you feel the same way I do, please pass on this article to as many colleagues, friends, family, workmates as possible. You will have done a service to this beautiful continent.

LONG LIVE AFRICA!!



Abortion rights in Poland

Anna Grzywacz, Poland

As young women living in Poland under the current abortion law, my friends and I are almost religious in our use of contraceptives. I have never missed my pill because of the possibility of having an abortion in a country where it is illegal. That scenario frightens me. The Polish law on abortion is very strict. It is possible for a woman to have the procedure when her health is in danger, when the fetus is damaged or in case of rape. In reality, even in these cases the termination of pregnancy may be impossible. This happened to a mother of two who has been denied to have an abortion on the grounds of serious medical problems with her eyes. She gave birth to the third child and as a result she became half blind and incapable of taking care of her children. With the help from the Federation for Women and Family Planning she took the case to the European Court in Strasbourg.



Polish doctors refuse to perform abortions for a variety of reasons. Most of them hide behind the conscious clause in order not to get involved in any controversy. Furthermore, a large group of doctors are hypocrites. They will not perform the procedure, even when it's legal, but they'll do it illegally for a large sum of money in their private practice.

The costs for underground abortions exceed the average wage in Poland, the price might be equivalent even to two, or three times a month's earning. In other words, women pay the price for the shameful behaviour of certain doctors. Sometimes these women pay with their lives. In September 2004 a young woman, first time pregnant, died because the doctor refused to perform a medical examination that would put her at a small risk for miscarriage.

The badge I'm wearing with my bag says, "77% of

anti-abortion leaders are men. 100% of them will never be pregnant." This is a sad comment on the situation in Poland. In March the Polish Parliament (with a majority of male MPs) voted to liberalize the existing law. Apparently they believe that the current regulations are efficient. 40 million people live in Poland and about 150 legal abortions are performed each year. What the MPs fail to see is the number of illegal procedures, estimated at 200 000 per year. 57% of Polish citizens support the woman's right to a legal abortion.

I am here at this Youth Forum to gain advocacy skills and use them in further fight for changing the legal system. Soon it might be an even harder struggle because the conservatives are strong candidates for prevailing in the upcoming Presidency and Parliamentary elections. I am here because I refuse to live in constant fear of going through the hell of an underground abortion. I refuse to be denied the access to abortion because my country has a low birth rate. I am not a statistical indicator. I am a human being.



Picture taken at La Boca, Buenos Aires Argentina.

Thank you again to all of our participants, facilitators, staff, and funders for making the Youth Forum a reality.

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