

**Statement of Anika Rahman, Director, International Program,  
The Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, USA  
to the Plenary Session of the Hague Forum  
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My name is Anika Rahman and I represent the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, a legal and policy advocacy organization dedicated to the achievement of women's reproductive rights and health.

I stand before you to urge all governments to support women's reproductive rights. As stated by the ICPD Programme of Action, reproductive rights are human rights. Such human rights must be viewed broadly. Reproductive rights cannot be viewed merely as a right of access to reproductive health care and family planning services. Moreover, it cannot and should not be viewed as being only about the right of a woman to terminate a pregnancy. Abortion is ONE critical aspect of reproductive rights. The principle of reproductive rights is far broader. It incorporates a broad spectrum of rights that are focused on enabling women to make choices.

Indeed, there are two fundamental elements of reproductive rights. First, the right to reproductive health care. Second, and equally important, the right to reproductive self-determination. These rights are already supported by existing major international human rights instruments, which impose legal obligations on governments and hold governments accountable to citizens.

First, the right to reproductive health is explicitly mentioned in four human rights treaties, including the Women's Rights Convention, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Children's Convention and the Racial Discrimination Convention. This right must be understood to guarantee a range of quality of care that includes:

- Safe motherhood
- HIV/AIDS and STIs
- Abortion
- Infertility treatments

- A full range of quality contraception, including emergency contraception
- Sexual education; and
- Quality counseling.

Next, the equally critical right of reproductive self-determination. In human rights terms, this principle incorporates at least n different rights recognized by the international community in human rights treaties. Due to time constraints, I will not go through all of them, but highlight several:

1. Women's right to decide the number and spacing of children and the information and means to do so. This right encompasses the right to sexual education and to quality counseling, especially for youth and adolescents.
2. The right to marry and found a family. While this right is well known, women's right to enter into marriage with her free and informed consent and in conformity with a reasonable minimum age for marriage is often not observed.
3. The right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. This right includes the right of clients in medical settings to be provided treatment that is respectful and free of coercion and violence. It also prohibits all forms of violence against women.
4. The right to modify customs that discriminate against women, such as FC/FGM.
5. The right to life, liberty and security, which is implicated in 585,000 pregnancy-related deaths each year.
6. Last, but not least, the right to be free from gender discrimination in all its forms.

We urge governments to create the necessary conditions for these rights. In particular, we strongly urge all governments to undertake at least five major steps. These are:

- Implement legal and policy measure necessary for the achievements of ALL reproductive rights.

- Build a culture of rights and the language of rights by measures such as enhancing legal literacy and providing legal services.
- Develop indicators and mechanisms to monitor these rights.
- Operationalize these rights in an inter-sectoral manner that involves health, justice, and other social sector ministries.
- Ensure the political commitment to make the resources available to make this happen.

Madame President, in conclusion, reproductive rights are critical for the attainment of women's equal status in the world. The call for women's human rights would ring hollow if we did not commit ourselves to pursue such rights. We must realize that the achievement of these rights requires profound social, economic and political change with respect to women's status. We call upon governments to rise to this challenge.

Thank you, Madame President.