

**Youth Coalition Statement to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole
July 1, 1999**

The Youth Coalition on ICPD+5 would like to begin by stating that the ICPD+5 process thus far has made a positive step towards including young people's voices in this international decision-making process. UNFPA and WPF's organisation of a Youth Forum last February was the stepping stone we needed to coalesce as a group. Chairperson Choudhury's receptiveness to youth input allowed us opportunities to make several addresses to the Main Committee in the Hague Forum, and again to the Working Group at the PrepCom in March.

We believe this acceptance and confidence has not been misplaced and we hope we have been able to show government delegations and the broader NGO community alike, that we can articulate our ideas and experiences in a way that enriches the discussion and gives guidance—yes, I dare say guidance—to others on ideas which may help to meet the unique needs of young people and further the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action.

However, the Youth Coalition would like to register our extreme frustration and disappointment at the procedural changes occurring at the UNGASS which seek to limit NGO involvement in the final state of the ICPD+5 process. Not only have they limited NGO presence in the gallery to around 50 people, when 400 would easily fit, but now they have told us they have eliminated the 5 NGO speaker slots.

Instead, NGOs willing to speak, are relegated here, the Committee of the Whole, where, with all due respect, we are speaking to people who have heard us repeatedly over the past 4 months and already know our issues.

It all boils down to partnership. Partnership between government international bodies, and civil society organisations is essential to implementing the Cairo Programme of Action and young people are vital to that equation. The opportunity for NGOs to engage the heads of state at the General Assembly encourages national leaders to return home and improve dialogue and increase their receptiveness to partnerships with civil society.

Cutting NGOs off from the General Assembly demonstrates that the UN system and government delegations are not serious about this partnership with civil society. But the fact is they can't do it without us. Their lack of commitment to a true partnership will mean failure of policies and programs. In particular, programs aimed at young people absolutely require their full participation and involvement. We are creative, we have vision, we are strong and we are willing to be there to make things happen.

Governments and the UN must realise that their attitudes are behind the times. NGOs, as often as governments, are implementing development programs. For instance, peer education programs are happening and they are working. Trained young people are informing and educating other young people about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. And this is going to be one of their best lines of defence against STIs and unwanted pregnancies, and key to their own empowerment.

Young peoples' sexual and reproductive rights are human rights. They have a right to non-judgemental, confidential and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services. There has to be equality of access and special attention needs to be given to vulnerable young people disadvantaged by poverty, race, religion, sexual activity, sexual orientation, geographical location or disability. And of course, we need increased mobilisation of resources to meet these needs, including at least 20% of donor allocations for sexual and reproductive health programs to be earmarked to meet young peoples' needs.

The frustration we are feeling today does not dampen our determination. We are more committed than ever to the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action. We will return to our own countries and work harder, and with more energy. We will spread the word to other young people. We have set our goals and we will get there. We will grow stronger, but as we grow older, we will pass the yellow button on to other young people. You will see the Youth Coalition again in 5 years time and we hope to see a stronger commitment on behalf of governments and the UN to partnership with us in implementing the Cairo agenda.