

CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS
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ORAL STATEMENT FOR THE 44TH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICA COMMITTEE OF
EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD
(2nd October 2024-12th October 2024)

Honourable Chairperson and Committee Members,

The Center for Reproductive Rights is grateful for the opportunity to make a statement before this distinguished forum and commends the Committee and Secretariat for the successful organization of the 44th Session.

We extend our heartfelt condolences on the passing of Honourable Theophane Nikyema and honour his dedication to advancing the rights and welfare of children Across Africa. His contributions and the impact of his work will long be remembered.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which came into force in 1999, provides a robust framework for protecting and promoting the rights of children in Africa. Central to this framework are the Four Core Principles: Non-Discrimination, Life, Survival and Development, Best Interests of the Child, and Right to be Heard and Participate. As an organization that is committed to ensuring that sexual and reproductive health rights are recognized as fundamental human rights core for survival and healthy the Center continues to draw the Committee's attention to the ongoing challenges and dire consequences of inadequate access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) information and services for adolescents across many African countries as highlighted in the Continental Study Report on Teenage Pregnancy that was launched by this very committee during the 43rd Ordinary Session. These challenges, exacerbated by cultural, legal, political and social barriers, severely limit adolescents' ability to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, leading to high rates of teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

While we acknowledge that some progress has been made in integrating age-appropriate Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) within education systems, we note that this process has frequently been met with contestation and opposition due to the perceived incompatibility of CSE with cultural and religious values and the lack of a regional

guidelines for states on SRHR and definition on CSE. This resistance continues to impede the widespread adoption and implementation of CSE, thus depriving adolescents, especially girls, of vital accurate information that could contribute towards improved health outcomes, reduction in adolescent pregnancies, and unsafe abortion, thereby promoting their safe passage to adulthood and facilitating them to reach their full potential in educational achievement.

We express concern over Kenya's regression, evidenced by its withdrawal from the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) ministerial commitment to Comprehensive Sexuality Education in May 2023. This claw-back significantly undermines efforts to empower adolescents with age-appropriate, scientifically accurate comprehensive sexuality education.

We wish to highlight the challenge occasioned by the omission of topics such as contraception and abortion from sexuality education frameworks in many African countries, including Zambia and Kenya, despite both states permitting abortion under specific circumstances such as risk to the life and health of the mother. The exclusion results in critical information gaps, thereby perpetuating the risks associated with unsafe abortion practices.

The Center calls upon the Committee to develop guidelines on adolescent SRHR that will provide guidance to states on how to respect, protect and promote adolescents' rights. We also call upon the Committee to urge member states to address identified gaps and put in place measures to ensure access to comprehensive, scientifically accurate, age-and-developmentally-appropriate sexuality education that is based on human rights and gender equality.

In closing, we also call upon the Committee to take note of regression on sexual and reproductive health education for adolescents and put in place measures to defend the progress that has been made, and to ensure that adolescent sexual reproductive health and rights are respected, protected and promoted.

Thank you.