



ICW/WGNRR Joint World AIDS Day Statement on the SRHR of Young Women Living with HIV

My Life, My Choice, My Sexual & Reproductive Rights!

December 1st 2014

This World AIDS Day, the International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW)'s Chapter for Young Women, Adolescents, and Girls (CYWAG), and the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) are emphasizing the need to realize the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young women and girls living with HIV!

Gender inequality is still a major issue affecting many girls and young women around the world, playing a huge role in increasing their vulnerability to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The current context of HIV clearly illustrates the importance of acknowledging how the virus affects young women and girls, where:

- Every minute a young woman is infected with HIV;¹
- Young women and girls make up 64% of all new infections among young people;²
- HIV is the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age;³
- Less than 30% of young women and girls around the globe have correct and comprehensive knowledge on HIV.⁴

In addition, these inequalities hinder the social and economic mobility of young women, leaving many girls at risk of perpetual poverty, as is experienced by many CYWAG sisters.

We believe that SRHR are central in promoting gender equality, ensuring proper and comprehensive HIV treatment, and preventing new HIV infections; all key factors in helping to reduce poverty and advance sustainable social and economic development.

Comprehensive SRHR programs and services provide an opportunity to equip young people with the tools and information they need to exercise meaningful and informed decision-making power in relation to their sexual and reproductive health, thereby enabling the attainment of a whole range of other rights. Yet because of ongoing gender inequality as well as socio-cultural norms and taboos, young women and girls worldwide face considerable challenges in exercising their SRHR, particularly if they are living with HIV.

When trying to access sexual and reproductive health information and services, young women and girls living with HIV are often multiply marginalized, as a result of their age, gender, economic situation, and HIV status. As such, they are often at high risk of experiencing violations of their sexual and reproductive rights,⁵ such as discriminatory and humiliating treatment; breaches of consent and confidentiality; physical and emotional violence and abuse; and denial

¹ UNAIDS (2012), [Every minute, a young woman is newly infected with HIV](#).

² UNFPA (2012), [From Childhood to Womanhood: Meeting the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Adolescent Girls](#).

³ World Health Organization (2013), [Women's health](#).

⁴ UNAIDS (2012), [Every minute, a young woman is newly infected with HIV](#).

⁵ Ibid.

of services.⁶ In some cases, young women and girls living with HIV are subjected to forced or coerced sterilization and abortion,⁷ amounting to cruel and inhumane treatment and torture, as recognized by international and regional human rights bodies.⁸

When the SRHR of young women and girls is unmet, their ability to manage their HIV care and overall health outcomes is hindered, thus hampering their social and economic development, as well as efforts to strengthen HIV prevention and eradicate related stigma and discrimination. As importantly, the neglect and denial of the SRHR of young women and girls living with HIV is tantamount to violating their fundamental human rights and freedoms. For as affirmed by States worldwide through the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the human rights of women include the right for all women to “have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.”⁹

With this in mind, we urge governments to undertake the following actions:

- Reaffirm the right of young women and girls living with HIV to choose who to love and be intimate with, as well as to choose if and when to be sexually active, free from coercion, discrimination and violence;
- Ensure universal access to comprehensive sexual education which is gender sensitive and life-skills based, delivered in a manner consistent with the evolving capacity of adolescents and young people;
- Ensure universal access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including a full range of voluntary and high-quality contraceptives, as well as access to safe, legal and affordable abortion services, free of marital and parental consent requirements;
- End the forced and coerced sterilization and abortions of women living with HIV as this is a grave human rights violation;
- Ensure access to antiretroviral therapy, of central importance in the prevention of mother to child HIV transmission and transmission between sexual partners.

On World AIDS Day 2014, ICW and WGNRR call upon individuals worldwide to stand up and acknowledge the SRHR of young women living with HIV, and hold governments accountable to their commitments regarding women and girls’ human rights! We encourage YOU to be a part of this movement, because together we are stronger and can change the world.

Through the funding of Stop AIDS Now!, ICW and WGNRR are currently undertaking a new joint project based in Nigeria. The project will bring together activists from both the SRHR and HIV communities, in a unified movement to meaningfully improve the provision of SRHR services for all, in Nigeria and around the world. To learn more about the project, follow us on Facebook and Twitter!

ICW – [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#)

WGNRR – [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#)

⁶ UNDP et al (2013). [Protecting the Rights of Key HIV-Affected Women and Girls in Healthcare Settings: A Legal Scan](#).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, [A/HRC/22/53](#), paras. 46-48.

⁹ 1995 [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), para. 96.