

The Call of Teenage African Girls!

We African girls, from Tunisia, Mali, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon and Uganda, gathered here in Nairobi from 10th to the 12th of November, supported by the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) in partnership with her members hereby present our authentic voices to the world. We met as representatives of African girls in all our diversities. We gathered to review the status of African girls in the last 25 years since the adoption of the ICPD program of action in Cairo. We came here to deliberate and have a collective voice as African girls. We are appreciating the opportunity to gather and meet with other girls from across the continent and share ideas and strategies. We have learned a lot about our shared life experiences, and are now strengthening our collective engagement as the girls and young women of Africa.

We set out on our journeys, some as long as fifteen hours, to attend the Nairobi summit - ICPD25. We came expecting to travel back home with great news that the faces of African girls have been seen, their voices heard and the commitments towards addressing their issues have been made by global and regional decision makers.

It is however disappointing that the conditions in the ICPD Nairobi conference resulted in exclusion and marginalization of girls' voices. Out of 40 of us who travelled from across Africa to participate, only 15 were allowed entrance into a space that was meant to be ours. The majority of us had pending accreditation which locked us out of this important meeting. We felt neglected and isolated. In addition, those who got the opportunity to attend the conference faced some challenges due to inconsistency accessibility of facilities especially for girls with physical disabilities. Additionally, the scheduling of our side event came at the tail end of the summit which clearly means we are not a priority to the Conference and we could not voice our issues in good time to influence the discussions and outcome of this meeting.

As representatives of African teenage girls, we therefore hereby urge the organizers of ICPD25, going forward, to accredit all teenage girls wishing to participate in future summits because the ICPD was and will always be about us and our future. A lot of resources, sacrifice and energy were put into preparing this conference. We traveled long distances and missed school lessons to be here. Sadly, in a space that was meant to be ours, we learned it is not inclusive of us!

ICPD25 is an important space to table, discuss, deliberate and commit resources to advance teenage girls rights especially sexual reproductive health rights. Through the pre- ICPD25 forum organized by FEMNET, we have learnt about the commitments our governments made in Cairo 25 years ago. We affirm that the commitments and promises made in Cairo are still valid however; accountability towards achieving those commitments is hugely missing especially in our African countries.

We African teenage girls commit to continue to march for inclusivity of teenage girls in all of their diversities in these important forums where decisions about our bodies are being made. We will no long remain silent as decisions are made for us, about us. We will continue to rise, roar and march for adequate financing of these commitments.

Importantly, we march for peaceful and inclusive societies because sometimes those who ought to protect us are the ones who violate our rights, abuse us and are not held accountable for their actions.

We call upon Africa and the whole world to join us and Say NO to Isolation, Discrimination and Misrepresentation of African Teenage girls.

We thank you.