

ITEM 8 General debate

STATEMENT

Mr President

I deliver this statement on behalf of Action Canada for Population and Development, the Federation of Women and Family Planning and the Sexual Rights Initiative.

Today is the Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion, which focuses this year on explaining the myths about safe and legal abortion.

The Vienna Declaration was a milestone for the human rights of women. Reproductive rights - including access to safe and legal abortion - is a fundamental part of women's human rights and the Vienna Declaration further reaffirms the importance of ensuring the universality, objectivity and non-selectivity of the consideration of human rights issues.

Access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services including access to safe and legal abortion still remains a significant problem in many countries due to its criminalization. The decriminalization of abortion is seen as one of the key solutions to guarantee access to safe and legal services. But it has to be emphasized that even when abortion is not criminalized, there are still many barriers that women can and do face in obtaining safe and legal services. Decriminalization of abortion therefore does not alone guarantee full access to safe and legal abortion.

In order to guarantee access to abortion, decriminalization needs to be followed by eliminating further - legal and practical - obstacles. These obstacles include: conscientious objection, mandatory counseling, mandatory waiting periods, parental and spousal consent laws, cost, geographical accessibility and other socio-economic status barriers that cause additional obstacles and should be seen as discriminatory practice. Social attitudes to abortion - such as the stigma that surrounds it or the medical personnel's opinions and prejudices - can also seriously limit access to safe procedures.

These obstacles and more seriously limit the rights of women and affect their health and dignity. In many cases, women have to resort to clandestine services, which are unsafe by definition, and are a leading cause of preventable maternal mortality and morbidity.

We call upon the Council to uphold the rights of women by identifying the human rights dimensions of unsafe abortion, elaborating State obligations with respect to addressing unsafe abortion and eliminating all obstacles in access to safe and legal abortion services.

Thank you