



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

#### Fifty-eighth session

10-21 March 2014

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women  
and to the special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development  
and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of  
strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern  
and further actions and initiatives**

### **Statement submitted by *Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir*, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).



## Statement

*Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir* [“Catholic Women for the Right to Decide”] is a non-profit civil association in consultative status with the United Nations, dedicated to promoting and defending the human rights of women in Argentina. We are part of the Latin American Network of Catholic Women for the Right to Decide. As such, we hail the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

In this context we hope that at the 58th session of the Commission, in addressing the issue of “challenges and achievements in implementing the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls”, the member country delegations represented will consider the various realities and contexts of women, young people and girls, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, where there are the widest gaps in terms of access and equity with respect to sexual and reproductive health, resulting in very high rates of adolescent pregnancies, unwanted pregnancies, and maternal morbidity and mortality associated with unsafe abortion. In the particular case of Argentina, this reality means that our country is not going to meet the MDG 5, which is to reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio by the year 2015.

In this respect, we deem it important during this session that the Commission should consider the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, dealing with the issue of abortion, in which he specifies: “Criminal laws penalizing and restricting induced abortion are the paradigmatic examples of impermissible barriers to the realization of women’s right to health and must be eliminated. These laws infringe women’s dignity and autonomy by severely restricting decision-making by women in respect of their sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, such laws consistently generate poor physical health outcomes, resulting in deaths that could have been prevented, morbidity and ill-health, as well as negative mental health outcomes, not least because affected women risk being thrust into the criminal justice system. Creation or maintenance of criminal laws with respect to abortion may amount to violations of the obligations of States to respect, protect and fulfil the right to health” (see [A/66/254](#)).

Consequently, we ask that during this session the Commission should also consider the latest steps agreed by the States of Latin America and the Caribbean in the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development adopted at the first session of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (Montevideo, 2013), which promoted in our region the full recognition and advancement of sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality as human rights essential to the international development agenda.

The Consensus expressed concern “at the high rates of maternal mortality, due largely to difficulties in obtaining access to proper sexual health and reproductive health services or to unsafe abortions, and aware that some experiences in the region have demonstrated that the penalization of abortion leads to higher rates of maternal mortality and morbidity and does not reduce the number of abortions, and that this holds the region back in its efforts to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals.”

In particular, we wish to stress that States agreed, in paragraph 40, “to eliminate preventable cases of maternal morbidity and mortality, including, within

the set of integrated benefits of sexual health and reproductive health services, measures for preventing and avoiding unsafe abortion, including sexual health and reproductive health education, access to modern and effective contraceptive methods, counselling and comprehensive care in cases of unwanted and unaccepted pregnancy, as well as comprehensive post-abortion care, where necessary, on the basis of a risk- and harm-reduction strategy.”

We reaffirm the importance of considering the document agreed by States at the 12th Regional Conference on Women of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the 2013 “ Santo Domingo Consensus”, which specifically calls upon states (in paragraph 78) to “ensure, in cases where abortion is legal or decriminalized in national legislation, the existence of safe, good-quality abortion services for women with unwanted and unaccepted pregnancies” and (in paragraph 95) to “guarantee that all victims and survivors of violence against women (including the victims’ children and dependents, if any) have immediate access to comprehensive care services, psychosocial and mental health support, treatment of injuries, shelter, and care following instances of rape or sexual assault, and access to emergency contraception, prophylaxis for sexually transmitted infections and safe abortion services in cases of rape.”

We are also asking for progress on the agreements adopted in this area during the 57th session of the Commission, in which explicit reference was made to access to abortion services as a means of eradicating violence against women, in the following terms: “Address all health consequences, including the physical, mental and sexual and reproductive health consequences, of violence against women and girls by providing accessible healthcare services that are responsive to trauma and include affordable, safe, effective and good-quality medicines, first line support, treatment of injuries and psychosocial and mental health support, emergency contraception, safe abortion where such services are permitted by national law, post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV infection, diagnosis and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, training for medical professionals to effectively identify and treat women subjected to violence, as well as forensic examinations by appropriately trained professionals” (see [E/2013/27](#)).

Lastly, we want to stress the importance of the secular State for achieving greater gender equality and recognition of human rights, in particular sexual and reproductive rights, as was made explicit in the two regional consensus documents: “A secular state is one of the elements fundamental to the full exercise of human rights, the deepening of democracy and the elimination of all forms of discrimination” (see the Montevideo Consensus), and “a secular state and the implementation of participatory forms of government are guarantees for the effective exercise of human rights and the consolidation of democracy, transparency and governance” (see the Santo Domingo Consensus).

We recognize the ongoing support of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in opening debate and moving forward toward greater gender equality in the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights among all players involved in this process.

We highlight the distinguished role of the Argentine delegation in the negotiations for moving forward with the regional documents from Montevideo and

Santo Domingo, which demonstrate the commitment, the achievements and the remaining challenges facing our country in the area of sexual and reproductive rights, especially with respect to unsafe abortion.

We hope that this process will have a global impact for further progress in the recognition of women's human rights. Moreover, in pursuit of the post-2015 agenda, we want to guarantee mechanisms for monitoring, which will include objectives, targets and indicators for evaluating impact, applicable to all players involved, disaggregated, sufficient, pertinent and timely, in which sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality will be considered as a primordial theme and as a fundamental part of human rights and development of the individual.

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