

STATEMENT ICPD30 Regional Conference

Thematic Session 3: Inequalities, social inclusion and rights

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Chair, friends,

I am honoured to be part of this panel on inequalities, social inclusion and rights, key issues if we are to realise sexual and reproductive health and rights.

I will share some experiences from my country, Norway. You may know that Norway is a country which ranks high on the Human Development Index with high life expectancy, free education for all, good access to health services and good scores on gender equality.

But chair, my first point is that this did not come about by itself. A hundred, or even fifty years ago, Norway was a highly unequal society.

The fight for social and gender equality started more than a century ago, and many actors have been, and continue to be, involved:

- Women's rights organizations fought for equality, and achieved progress in partnership with some brave politicians.
- Knowledge supports advocacy. We saw scientists, teachers, and others such as religious leader and priests seen the social disparity present in our communities, collecting data and knowledge on these disparities, paving the way for
- Popular movements, which spurred politicians and parliamentarians to create policies and laws that has made real change in women's lives, and in the lives of the poor and marginalised.

The key has been cooperation between different mass movements such as the labour movement and the women's movement, some politicians, academia, and other actors, working together to achieve lasting change.

For every person to experience social and gender equality, and the realization of their sexual and reproductive rights, there needs to be systemic structures to enable it. The systemic structures need continuous attention and strengthening.

Against this backdrop, I would like to focus on a few areas where we over the years have made progress in terms of inclusion and alleviating inequities, but where we still have work to do.

Even though Norway is ranked high in global gender gap indexes we still have challenges in terms of ensuring gender equality in all spheres of life.

There are laws and regulations in place to promote equality and prevent discrimination. The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud gives guidance to individuals, employers and public authorities. The Anti-Discrimination Tribunal is a free of charge alternative to judicial proceedings in cases of discrimination, harassment and retaliation.

Sexual health, and access to sexual and reproductive services is imperative to reach an equal society. Norway has a long history of focusing on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We provide Comprehensive Sexuality Education at every level of our education system, linked to services where required. Contraception use is high, and free contraception for young people has led to low teenage pregnancies.

I am very concerned about voices that call for restricting access to safe and legal abortion, as a means to reduce the number of abortions. Our experience in Norway is the contrary. Since abortion became available on demand in the late 1970s, our experience is that the number of abortions is reducing.

Social inclusion is a priority for the Norwegian Government.

Achieving social inclusion means working at the policy level, as well as translating policies into reality, through public efforts and through partnerships. I will mention just two examples:

- We are strengthening efforts against sexual harassment and violence in intimate relationships. We counter attitudes and actions that lead to negative

social control, honour-related violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and gender based violence.

- Last year we launched a white paper on human rights for people with cognitive disabilities. The Government elaborates what the human rights model is, including the principle on autonomy, equality and participation. This is a basis for policies relating to people with disabilities, to ensure it is rights-based.

When we talk about partnerships to achieve gender equality, we recognise that to ensure equality of women, we need to involve men as partners. We are also working to get an overview of boys' and men's gender equality challenges, and have appointed a public committee to get a comprehensive overview of gender equality challenges faced by boys and men.

The challenge that can be experienced in intersectionality and the LGBTQI+ community is an important topic in many official documents related to equality and discrimination. Our Action Plan for Gender and Sexual Diversity launched in 2023 have measures in order to counter this kind of discrimination.

Friends, to wrap up, I would like to reiterate Norway's support for the ICPD Programme of Action, and of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the importance of social justice for progress. Norway commits to protect and promote universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all – including girls, youth, and marginalised groups, ensuring that we leave no-one behind.

Thank you.