

**Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights in the  
Arab World  
A Regional Conference  
Rabat – 19-21 May 2007**



# **Rabat 2007 Declaration**

IPPF Arab World Member Associations, parliamentarians, regional experts, youth advocates and service providers from 13 Arab countries gathered in Rabat, Morocco from 19-21 May 2007 to redouble efforts to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Region.

More than 100 participants reaffirmed their commitment to fulfilling the human rights of all, recognizing the universality of human rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, age, or any other status. They reviewed strategies to use human rights approaches for improving sexual and reproductive health throughout the Arab World, taking into account the specific context of each country and of the Region as a whole.

Discussions on a range of complex reproductive right and health issues took place, in an atmosphere that respected different views while underlining a commitment felt by all participants that the Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 continues to be an essential tool for improving the health of women, men and young people, and advancing the extent to which their rights are respected and protected in the region.

### **Participants voiced concern at regional data showing that: -**

- Young people number close to 100 million, but they lack access to youth-friendly reproductive and sexual health services, including counselling
- Maternal mortality and morbidity remain unacceptably high. Every year in the Arab region, some 32,000 women die in childbirth or from complications arising from pregnancy. In many cases women have too many pregnancies, too closely spaced or they are too young or too old to bring pregnancies to term without complications; inadequate maternal health care means that too many women are dying to give birth.
- Violence against women and girls is pervasive, but not well documented in the Arab States
- Harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting, often result in debilitating reproductive health conditions. In some Arab States, between 70 per cent and 97 per cent of women have had the procedure, most of them before the age of 12.

- Most of the Arab States have relatively low HIV infection rates, but half a million people in the Arab States are HIV positive, including 160,000 young people. Most states have instituted national HIV prevention programmes, but monitoring and implementation are problematic and services for high risk groups remain largely inadequate.

### **Conference Participants: -**

Reiterated that the implementation of the outcomes of international conferences, especially the 1994 ICPD Declaration and Programme of Action, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, and their follow-up processes, are essential for meeting the Millennium Development Goals;

Recognized the 2005 World Summit Heads of State and Government commitment to achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015;

Endorsed the UN Millennium Project recognition that the Millennium Development Goals will not be attained without progress on voluntary family planning, women's empowerment, safe motherhood and action against sexually transmitted infections (including HIV/AIDS) and gender-based violence;

Added their voice to the 2003 Rabat Declaration on Population and Development issued by the Forum of the Arab and African Parliamentarians on Population and Development;

Emphasized the value of partnership between the Arab Parliamentarians Forum on Population and Development and the IPPF/Arab World Region and reaffirmed the importance of the civil society involvement in ensuring that sexual and reproductive health and rights are fully respected and protected

Emphasized the importance of involving young people fully in international, regional and local decision-making and programme planning and delivery in respect of their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

## Participants pledged to: -

Apply a rights-based approach to their work in promoting sexual and reproductive health to ensure participation, accountability and inclusiveness in programmes. Such an approach seeks to address gender-based violence; encourage equity within relationships, guarantee that services are accountable to users, and empower users to make sexual and reproductive health choices for themselves.

Address the needs of young people, both in and out of school, for effective human rights education, and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health information, education and services in ways that fully involve young people in all stages of the process

Strengthen the advocacy and communications capacity of young people and create further sexual and reproductive health and rights awareness-raising opportunities, including international days of action.

Redouble efforts to reduce maternal mortality, noting that at present the Arab World is not on target to reach this Millennium Development Goal

Increase the access of vulnerable groups to sexual and reproductive health and rights information, education and services

Enhance the effectiveness of HIV/AIDS care programmes, prevention and treatment, and eliminate the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS

Reduce the incidence of unsafe abortion, raise awareness of the public health and human rights impact of unsafe abortion, and provide safe abortion services to the fullest extent of the law.

Eliminate gender-based violence, including early and forced marriage, female genital cutting; rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and violence against women and girls in situations of occupation and armed conflict.

Designate a day for youth in the Arab Region to discuss Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights.

Participants pledged to continue to address these issues in ways that build consensus and resonate with local values within the Arab World, and which increase the extent to which the human rights of all people, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, are respected, protected and fulfilled in the region. They also agreed to redouble efforts to ensure the availability of the financial resources needed to address these issues effectively.

Participants also pledged to work with a range of civil society organizations, including Parliamentarians and religious leaders, to find ways of increasing the extent to which addressing human rights in general, and sexual and reproductive health and rights in particular are consistent with national and regional legislation and development priorities throughout the Arab World.