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for Immediate Release

On the re-launch of May 28 International Day of Action for Women's Health, Women's Rights Defenders Worldwide Call for the Inclusion of Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

This May 2014, in commemoration of 30 years of struggle and activism reflected in the victories of the women's rights movement in the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and in the IV World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), women's rights defenders and activists worldwide are re-launching May 28, the International Day of Action for Women's Health, by calling on governments to ensure a holistic, inclusive, and human rights-based approach to women and girls' health, which includes sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

On May 28 1987, during the IV International Women's Health Meeting in Costa Rica, women's rights activists proposed to celebrate May 28 as the International Day of Action for Women's Health, as a means to speak out on SRHR issues faced by women and girls all over the world.

Nearly 30 years on, activists warn that the full realization of all women's SRHR remains far from being addressed, as "women's health" has often been reduced to a limited understanding of maternal health, overlooking the actual needs of all women in their diversities. As a result, significant challenges persist, in terms of recognizing sexual rights in addition to reproductive rights, ensuring universal access to contraceptives and safe and legal abortion, as well as comprehensive sexuality education for young people, among other critical SRHR issues.

“This narrow and limited understanding of women’s SRHR is especially evident in the realities of women and girls in vulnerable situations,” explains Kathy Mulville of Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR), “such as young, single or unmarried women, older women, women of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, indigenous women, women living with HIV, sex workers, and women living with disabilities, among many others.”

Evidence from the ground confirms huge shortcomings in achieving women’s SRHR. Adolescent girls, for one, are less likely than older women to access sexual and reproductive health care, including modern contraception, and skilled assistance during pregnancy and childbirth.¹ Across the globe, moreover, indigenous women, women living with HIV, and women living with a disability, among other groups, have been subjected to forced or coerced abortion or sterilization, with such cases documented in the Czech Republic, Namibia, Chile, Mexico, and India, among others.² As well, older women, particularly those who are widowed or single, are routinely excluded from sexual and reproductive health programmes, and are reported to find it embarrassing or difficult to procure condoms or to seek advice on safer sexual practices, while a recent report from the World Health Organization and UNAIDS showed an increase in HIV and STIs among older people.³

“In spite of these realities, there is a lack of meaningful commitment on the part of governments to address our needs and ensure all women’s rights to decide freely upon all aspects of our body, our sexuality and our lives, free from discrimination, coercion and violence,” says Kathy Mulville. “We need to hold governments accountable to their existing commitments, and ensure that national policies effectively guarantee and support women’s choices and rights in relation to all aspects of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, throughout their whole lives,” she adds.

Governments around the world are currently involved in the process of evaluating achievements under the present global development agenda expressed in the Millennium Development Goals, set to end in 2015, and as such are also in the midst of formulating a Post-2015 Development Agenda. As women worldwide will be affected by the decisions governments make when framing the Post-2015 Development Agenda, women’s rights advocates urge women, stakeholders and allies worldwide to make their voices heard, and highlight the diverse nature of women’s SRHR issues that arise throughout women’s lives.

WGNRR is undertaking the re-launch of the May 28 campaign in collaboration with over 20 international, regional and national organizations, in an effort to mobilize women all over the world to demand the inclusion of their human right to health in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, of which our sexual and reproductive health and rights are an integral part.

With less than three weeks left to go before the International Day of Action for Women’s Health, WGNRR is calling on members, allies, partners, as well as the general public to become part of

¹ UNFPA (2012), “From Childhood to Womanhood: Meeting the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Adolescent Girls,” retrieved 6 May 2014 from <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/factsheets/srh/EN-SRH%20fact%20sheet-Adolescent.pdf>.

² Open Society Foundations, “Against Her Will: Forced and Coerced Sterilization of Women Worldwide,” retrieved 6 May 2014 from <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/against-her-will-20111003.pdf>.

³ World Health Organization (2013), “Sexual Health in Older Women,” retrieved 6 May 2014 from <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/91/9/13-119230/en/>.

the movement and join global efforts to promote, defend, and demand women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Interested individuals and organizations are encouraged to visit www.may28.org to learn more about the campaign, the May 28 Call for Action, what they can do in their communities and ways in which they can participate.

Additional partners are set join the May 28th campaign throughout the month, please visit www.may28.org for updates.

May 28th, International Day of Action for Women's Health is being coordinated by the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) in collaboration with the following partners as per May 8, 2014:

AIDS Accountability International
Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (APA)
Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW)
Asia Safe Abortion Partnership (ASAP)
ASTRA
ASTRA Youth
Centre for Reproductive Rights
CREA
Decidir Nos Hace Libres
Human Rights in Childbirth
International Centre for Reproductive Health (ICRH)
International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW Global)
International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion
IPPF – Western Hemisphere
PopDev, Hampshire College
RODA
Sonke Gender Justice Network
Talking About Reproductive and Sexual Health Issues (TARSHI)
Women's Networking Zone for the AIDS 2014 Conference
Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC)
WomenDeliver
World YWCA
Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR)

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