

RENMUN VI

Finding Solace in Solidarity



March 6 – 7, 2021

CHAIR REPORT

Commission on the Status of Women

Chair Introduction

Hello everyone, I am Eugenia, your head chair for The Commission on the Status of Women this conference. I'm a year 12 from Renaissance College, and I'm glad to be able to facilitate discussion around gender equality and the empowerment of women alongside my fellow schoolmate and deputy chair Shraddha. I hope that everyone is able to develop their own opinions and learn to resolve problems through negotiation in our increasingly globalised society. For all delegates, old and new, this conference can be your next step in your MUN journey, and through this, I look forward to fruitful debates and a generally rewarding experience.

The Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) is a commission within ECOSOC – which is one of the 6 principal organs of the United Nations – dedicated to the empowerment of women and achieving gender equality. We felt that the topics we chose were highly important topics of today that are still majorly hindering the empowerment of women and were further exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. As such, delegates should try to engage themselves fully in creating sustainable and adaptable solutions to problems facing the women of our world today. Please read the chair reports carefully and research your countries position in detail, to ensure that the solutions and debate we participate in is relevant and as authentic as possible.

Ultimately, as this is a beginner committee, we understand that many of you may be less experienced in your MUN journey, but we believe that as long as you are prepared and bring your enthusiasm, we can enlighten our worldview and approach the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of women collectively. If you have any lingering questions or concerns, feel free to contact us by email, as we are always willing to help out.

Best of luck,

Head Chair Eugenia Tong (20tongy1@rchk.edu.hk) and

Deputy Chair Shraddha Rajesh (rajess2@rchk.edu.hk)

Reproductive Rights and Women's Empowerment

"1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.

2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article, States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the postnatal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation."

-Article 12 of The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Though we may see that 185 members of the UN general assembly have committed to delivering on reproductive rights in terms of access to healthcare services, there are many places around the world in which women are unable to access the greatest opportunities, and live a life of discrimination and oppression. A large part of women empowerment nowadays comes from providing universal access to reproductive technology and sexual education, particularly as child marriages and pregnancy can often become obstacles in the life of women.

Hence, by ensuring access to reproductive rights, we will be able to help empower women worldwide on a much larger and effective scale, as we will effectively be helping them in economic and social realms of development. Ultimately, we should be returning the control over women's bodies back to them, and allow them to wrest control of their own futures and opportunities, rather than having them be defined by their reproductive partners or by society's expectations regarding family and sexual health.

Key Terms

Term	Definition
Sterilization	To render a person incapable of sexual reproduction, via procedures such as castration, vasectomy and salpingectomy.
Consent	The agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity (or any other actions)
Family Planning	Family planning helps families get their desired number of children and the timings of the births. It is done through the use of contraceptives and involuntary infertility treatment. Being able to space out and limit pregnancies has a direct impact on a woman's health and well being, as well as the success rate of pregnancy.
Sexual Health	Sex can be important to leading a healthy and balanced life. By being physically, emotionally, mentally, and socially healthy in relation to sexuality, it can help reduce disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health should be approached with positivity and respect, and everyone should be able to have a safe and pleasurable experience, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence. To maintain and attain sexual health, one must respect, protect and fulfil the sexual rights of all. To ensure public health policies and practices recognize and reflect this, much needs to be done.
Fertility	Fertility is the ability to conceive or to induce conception. One is infertile when even after one year of sexual relations without contraception they are unable to conceive, or when they are unable to carry a pregnancy to live birth.
Abortion	Abortion is when a pregnancy is terminated before the

	fetus is viable. Medically, abortion and miscarriages both refer to the termination of pregnancy before the fetus can survive outside of the uterus. The term abortion is commonly used in place of induced abortion, which is the deliberate termination of a pregnancy, which is different to miscarriages, which refers to a natural loss of a fetus.
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Background Information

With the formation of the UN, rights of numerous peoples across the globe began to be upheld and written about by member states of the body of nations. One of the most important documents that the UN came up with is the CEDAW, or the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women. Furthermore, over the years, the UN has also engaged in other actions and provided more declarations with regards to reproductive rights. Prior to the founding of the United Nations, there haven't been many examples of concrete action, laws, or policies which helped establish reproductive rights within respective nations. With the formation of the UN, a foundation for the protection of the rights of women was also established. This began at the Tehran Human Rights Proclamation. Soon afterwards, the 20-year Cairo Programme of Action, which addressed many concerns regarding women's rights and reproductive rights, was implemented by 184 UN member nations, which was further expounded on and supported by the 1995 Beijing Platform.

Most recently, there have been the Yogyakarta Principles, which are essentially propositions by experts on how international law in the aspect of women's rights and empowerment should be conducted. Although it is still not a standard, it presents a clear view of the world being increasingly supportive towards women's rights, and by extension, reproductive rights. With that in mind, it can be seen that over the past years, the UN has been a big advocate in advancing women's rights across the world. Furthermore, there are also many actions which the UN can still take in order to further support the cause for the advancement of women's rights. Despite the many challenges posed by the diversity of the world's nations, compromises are able to be struck with the aim of promoting peace, empowerment, and prosperity around the world.

Potential Clashes

Religion v. Contraception

A majority of religions traditionally do not allow any harm to life, even if life has not yet been born. Out of the “big five” religions, of which most religious people are a part of, Hinduism is an exception in that it has no restrictions on contraceptives. Buddhism, Islam and Judaism all frown upon the use of contraceptives that may prevent the implantation of an already fertilised embryo, whilst the most conservative Orthodox Jewish and the Catholic Church reject all forms of birth control. In most countries, religious people now take on a more modern stance on the use of birth control, which allows them to use it so long as it does not threaten their health. However, in countries like the Philippines, where the Catholic Church wields a lot of power, people are still taught by the church that the use of birth control is a “mortal sin”, though, in recent years, the government has understood the need for family planning and has taken steps to introduce such policies. Either way, this is not a problem contained in just a few specific countries and should be rectified in a way that does not offend the religion, whilst protecting the rights of women to access birth control.

Boosting population growth whilst empowering women

In many semi-developed and developed countries such as Iran, the population growth rate is decreasing and the fertility rate had dropped to 1.8 by the start of the previous decade. This is below the 2.1 births per woman needed to maintain a steady population growth, which has officials worried about an ageing population. However, this has led to contraceptive services and policies being repealed, and although this also increased maternity leave for expectant mothers, the decreased access to contraception has led to more women being pressured to bear children rather than participate in the workforce, as evidenced by the decrease in workforce involvement from 16.6% in 2014 to 12.3% in 2016 and an increased birth rate of 2.14 births per woman. Similarly, government propaganda has tried to create the view that it is a woman’s job to have children, which helps ostracize working women in society. This is the scenario in many countries with declining populations, as women are continually encouraged to leave the workforce, or even if urged to return, will have lost out on career continuity and workplace integration.

Access to sexual education and sexual health technology

Education is an increasingly relevant topic in developing nations, however, education regarding sexual and reproductive health, especially regarding women, is still incredibly scarce. Semi-developed and developed countries are facing a drop in birth rates while developing countries are facing a huge boom. The reason for this disparity is likely due to a global increase in resources such as food, while education, long term career opportunities for women and access to contraceptives have not caught up in developing nations. This means that governments on both sides of this spectrum are under pressure to get the country's birth rate closer to the optimal of 2.4 births per woman. Both extremes usually end up taking the choice away from women, which hinder female empowerment and their contribution to the global economy.

Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Involvement with the Issue
Philippines	Despite recent efforts by Duterte to subvert the Catholic Church in order to decrease repeated teen pregnancies in the country by introducing family planning policies, the church is still highly influential for many devout Filipinos. The churches policy against contraceptive use and rhetoric that those who do not oblige will be considered "heretics" has staved off contraceptive use. Additionally, the problem of access to sexual health education and contraception has been compounded by the coronavirus pandemic, in which strictly enforced stay at home orders mean that many couples are unable to purchase contraceptives, which risks undoing the work of Duterte's family planning policies. Out of all the nations in the world, the Philippines is a high profile one where women's access to sexual health services is most affected by religion and the beliefs adhering to it.
Sub-Saharan Africa	Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa often top the world in

	<p>rates of teenage pregnancies, of which sociocultural, economic, individual and health service factors were identified as the most significant ones. There is also another great problem within Sub-Saharan Africa, which is HIV/AIDS, which is a sexually transmitted disease that could be easily prevented through the correct use of contraception and appropriate testing. Due to societal pressures in countries like Nigeria, for female adolescents to get a boyfriend, but poor socio-economic conditions that make safe sexual activities difficult, there are many adolescents finding themselves in sub-optimal conditions that allow their cycle of poverty to continue. Sub-Saharan Africa is also one of the least urbanised regions in the world, with high birthrates, but this could also be due to the difficulty of ones access to reproductive services in rural villages as well as the general quality of education and particularly sex education, in these rural areas.</p>
Scandinavian nations	<p>Scandinavian nations like Sweden are some of the highest contributors to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in terms of the percentage of GDP spent on it, and have even contributed towards helping millions of other women internationally through funding to increase health budgets.</p>
Iran	<p>As mentioned previously, Iran is one of the countries where as a result of a low birth rate, the country has taken backwards steps that have actually disempowered women, as the effects of the incentives provided are not properly considered by the government.</p>

Possible Solutions

Opening sexual health clinics in rural areas

Opening sexual health clinics in rural areas is an essential factor in empowering women by educating women about their rights, and the general promotion of reproductive health across countries. In many nations, a significant proportion of the population live in rural areas, where infrastructure is quite lacking. As such, opening sexual health clinics in these areas would offer women, who may generally lack education as to their rights and responsibilities, to learn, understand, and make full use of their rights, as well as provide general sexual health related healthcare. Given that knowing one's rights and being able to make full use of them is a big factor which will allow more women to be empowered, opening sexual health clinics in rural areas is a definitive method, albeit quite costly, to ensure that a vast majority of the population would have knowledge as to their rights, and a place to go to if they encounter any sexual health problems.

Making commitments towards postnatal care

A lot of care and attention is given to pregnant women, but oftentimes that care does not extend past the delivery. Postnatal care is severely lacking in most countries around the world, and the quality of life for both the mother and the child is negatively impacted because of it. Delivery complications often extend past the actual delivery, resulting in --insert three medical terms here--, which can lead to lasting effects and occasionally even death. Nations should aim to encourage postnatal care both amongst health officials and the general public, especially in LEDC's where mortality rates during birth are high. Nations should also aim to provide services that will include regular checkups post-birth, and educate the women on how to stay hygienic and take care of their child. After the birth, those unfamiliar with contraception should also discuss family planning methods with doctors.

Decreasing taboos about sexual and reproductive health conversations through education and media

Misinformation, social stigma and taboos about sexual health are incredibly common, especially when they concern women's reproductive health. Governments should aim to implement programs through education and media

to help decrease this, as the negative effect this has on both the mental and physical health of the women is incredibly concerning, especially in developing nations where women are the most at risk. Programs could include encouraging news and entertainment outlets to showcase conversations about sexual and reproductive health on screen to normalise it to viewers, running education programs from primary school to foster an open mindset towards the topic, and openly advertising products like birth control to the general public.

Past Actions

Article 12 of The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – 1979

The first part of this article of CEDAW promulgated to all nations that they should take action to remove discrimination towards women in terms of access to healthcare, including access to relevant family planning services. The second part ensured that signatory nations would provide appropriate (and if necessary, free) services related to pregnancy and the postpartum period, as well as ensure that adequate nutrition to both mother and child would be provided. Other articles such as article 14 also briefly touch on access to family planning as a crucial cog in eliminating discrimination against women. CEDAW on a whole has tried to remove the societal views of women as those whose sole role is to procreate and has recognised that change needs to be brought forth.

Resolution 2011/1

This resolution passed in 2011 is a clear step taken by the UN to promote the advancement of Women's rights, aligning them with the millennium goals. This resolution calls for governments to actively participate and endorse initiatives that promote reproductive rights. Those initiatives include, but are certainly not limited to the funding of technological advancement, improving humanitarian efforts, improving health infrastructure, giving more access and education both in general and with regards to reproductive rights or family planning, enacting laws that safeguard marriages and supporting third world countries in their various initiatives to improve its situation in terms of women's' rights and general communal welfare. With all this in mind, the resolution has been a strong factor in upholding women's rights across the globe, as it affects the policies of all the nations who ascribe to the UN, and who agree to its initiatives.

Guiding Questions

- What is the most appropriate procedure for protecting the reproductive rights of women, considering the patriarchal and religious nature of some societies?
- What role should UNCSW and other responsible departments play in safeguarding the empowerment of women through promoting reproductive rights?
- Thus far, there have been certain methods and policies introduced to promote women empowerment through reproductive rights. What are the pros and cons of these methods?

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