

Center for Reproductive Rights
Oral Statement
CEDAW Committee Half-day of Discussion on the Right to Education

The Center for Reproductive Rights appreciates the opportunity to deliver this oral statement in contribution to the draft general recommendation on the right to education.

- As the CEDAW Committee recognizes, education is an essential vehicle for the realization of women and girls' equality, as it enhances their economic opportunities, public and political participation, and development of leadership skills.
- The Center for Reproductive Rights would like to draw the Committee's attention to two pressing issues that undermine the right to education: mandatory pregnancy testing and expulsion of pregnant schoolgirls and lack of comprehensive sexuality education.

The practice of mandatory pregnancy testing and expulsion of pregnant schoolgirls greatly exacerbates the vulnerability of pregnant adolescents and violates their right to education.

- This practice is based on the belief that girls who become pregnant will set a bad example for other girls and should be sanctioned for engaging in sexual activity. It also reinforces the stereotype that only girls – and not boys – are responsible for an unintended pregnancy.
- Mandatory pregnancy testing and expulsion of pregnant schoolgirls perpetuates inequality and discrimination by denying girls the necessary tools to obtain gainful employment and fully participate in public life. For many girls, the opportunities lost through expulsion can force them into early marriage or sex work.
- Therefore, it is critical that states immediately adopt policies barring discrimination on the basis of pregnancy in schools and take affirmative steps to accommodate the educational needs of pregnant schoolgirls.

Lack of comprehensive sexuality education constitutes another violation of the right to education and prevents girls from exercising reproductive autonomy and attaining substantive equality.

- Lack of comprehensive sexuality education can result from schools' failure to incorporate this into their curriculum or from parental consent requirements that enable parents to deny their children access to this critical information.
- Comprehensive sexuality education is essential for providing adolescents with the tools to exercise reproductive autonomy, prevent unplanned pregnancy, and enter into relationships on the basis of equality. This information is particularly critical for girls, who commonly face difficulty in negotiating contraceptive use and are exposed to greater rates of sexual violence.
- As girls must bear the physical burden of unplanned pregnancy, denial of comprehensive sexuality education can result in their inability to complete their education, greatly imperiling their future economic and employment opportunities, and thereby their ability to attain substantive equality.
- As such, comprehensive sexuality education must be considered a mandatory component of educational curricula and parental consent requirements for comprehensive sexuality education should be immediately repealed.