Breaking the silence around infertility: statement for the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25

Despite progress towards achieving comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, data from across the world show that approximately 186 million couples worldwide suffer from infertility and involuntary childlessness. The devastating effects of infertility include psychological distress, intimate partner violence, marital instability, risky sexual behaviours, economic hardship, stigma and exclusion. Infertility and involuntary childlessness cut across gender, class, race, age, geographical location, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity. (Starrs et al.2018). However, infertility and involuntary childlessness still remain invisible and highly tabooed and are rarely discussed.

The UN is heading to hold The Nairobi Summit to celebrate the 25th anniversary “ on International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25) in November 2019. The heart of the Nairobi Summit is a Global Commitment to:

1. Zero unmet need for family planning
2. Zero preventable maternal deaths and
3. Zero gender-based violence and harmful practices against women, girls and youth.

Even within the three Zero commitments we are concerned that there is an absolute silence around infertility and involuntary childlessness. We the undersigned organizations, academics and individual experts, write to express our collective concerns regarding the draft commitment which will be adopted by the Governments at Nairobi. https://www.nairobisummiticpd.org/

We request a desire to consider a fourth pillar of zero unmet need in SRHR:

Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is one of the cornerstones of population and development programmes, and is a key target of the SDGs 3.7, 5.6 and 4. It rests on the premise that all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so. However, it is equally important to include infertility, involuntary childlessness, a voluntary childfree status with the associated stigma, discrimination and unmet need for access to safe and affordable, quality treatment and management including psychosocial support as important reproductive health and rights issues within local and global-policy initiatives.

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1 The Breaking the silence around infertility: statement for the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 was developed during the Share-Net International SRHR Co-creation Conference “Engaging in Knowledge Translation Together”, which took place from the 8th until the 10th October 2019 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Participants developed knowledge products to influence policy and practice around Infertility.
Indeed, 25 years post-Cairo, it is time to rethink the meaning of reproductive “rights” through a framework that includes infertility and involuntary childlessness. We urge UN agencies, governments and partners to reflect on ICPD 25 commitment and include/visibilise infertility and involuntary childlessness as SRHR and public health concern.

This statement is endorsed by

Ivf Zimbabwe
Jean Bosco NDAYISHIMIYE, RR – Share-Net Burundi/ Population Media Center
Freya, patient organization for people with fertility problems in the Netherlands
Dr Cynthia Witsenburg, Dimbayaa Fertility for Africa
Klaudija Kordic / RODA-Roditelji u akciji / Croatia
Marie Thoma, Dept. of Family Science, School of Public Health, University of Maryland
Association for Infertility Treatment and Adoption Support ’Our Stork’ (Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Leczenia Niepłodności i Wspierania Adopcji ’Nasz Bocian’ ) Poland
Satu Rautakallio-Hokkanen, Fertility Europe
Bethan Coblcy, Marie Stopes International
Kiveli Greek Fertility Association
Susan Dierickx, Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Hashim Hounkpatin, Arayaa
Ønskebarn, the norwegian infertility association
Kishore Kumer Basak, RedOrange Limited
Association Chance for Parenthood
Dr Fabrice KAKUNZE, Share Net Burundi
YuHsin Huang
Dr Sheryl van der Poel; retired WHO/infertility; consultant
Share-Net Netherlands Infertility Community of Practice
Dr Emad Alsharu OBGYN -IVF Consultant COP / Share-Net-Jordan Jordan higher population council
Chelsea B. Polis, PhD, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Alison Gemmill, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
Michelle Jasczynski, University of Maryland School of Public Health
Stephane Helleringer, Johns Hopkins
Enow Awah Georges Stevens/Organisation For Health in Sustainable Development (OHISD)
Amelia Mackenzie, FHI 360
Joia CrearPerry National Birth Equity Collaborative
Alexander McLain, University of South Carolina
Marsha Jones The Afiya Center
Shades of Blue Project
Tammy Boyd Black Women’s Imperative
Linda Goler Blount and Black Women’s Health Imperative
Caitlin R. Williams, UNC - Chapel Hill
Sarojini N, Sama Resource Group for Women and Health
Angela Doyinsola Aina - Black Mamas Matter Alliance
Anna Z. Pollack, George Mason University
Arnob Chakrabarty, RedOrange Media & Communications
Michelle Eilers, the University of Texas at Austin
Andrea Jackson, MD University of California San Francisco
Jessica M Roach, MPH Restoring Our Own Through Transformation (ROOTT)
Dorian Wingard, MPA Restoring Our Own Through Transformation (ROOTT)
Monique McCrystal Restoring Our Own Through Transformation
Karen A. Scott, MD, MPH, FACOG - Independent Reproductive Justice Warrior, Clinician Scientist, Sexual, Reproductive & Perinatal Epidemiologist, Dissident, Disruptive, and Recovering Board Certified OB/GYN
Mandesa Smith, ACNM
Marie McCausland
Ebony Simpson
Tylondia M. Jones, MSW, LSW
Rachel Breman, University of Maryland, School of Nursing
Alice Cartwright, Gillings School of Global Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Alison Young, CNM Planned Parenthood
Sierra J. Austin, PhD
Daphina Melbourne
Dr. Monica Hahn, University of California San Francisco
Megan Christofield
Rania Alabbadi. The Higher population council Jordan
Hilde Kroes, SNI Community of Practice on Infertility member and SRHR consultant
Trudie Gerrits, University of Amsterdam
Aryanti Radyowijati, ResultsinHealth
Elly Leemhuis, SNI Community of Practice on Infertility member
KIT Royal Tropical Institute
Jaime Miracle, NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio
Danielle Jackson Restoring Our Own Through Transformation
SisterSong: National Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
Monica Simpson, SisterSong: National Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
Jordan Hevenor, The Womxn Project (TWP)
Katey Zeh, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Karla Gonzales Garcia, Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights (COLOR)
Nia Mitchell
Janette Robinson Flint / Black Women for Wellness
Erin Miles Cloud
Women's Rights and Empowerment Network (WREN)
Tanay Lynn Harris, Mommy Up
Share-Net International