**World Contraception Day, 26 September 2021**

**Every women and adolescent girl has the right to access contraception and family planning services, information and education, UN Experts say**

GENEVA (23 September 2021) – Under international human rights law, States must ensure sexual and reproductive health services, including modern forms of contraception, and information and education on family planning.

Ahead of the World Contraception Day on 26 September, the experts\* issued the following statement:

“Access to family planning and contraception services, free of coercion or impediment, is a component of the right to health that is central to women’s autonomy and agency and key in the realization of women’s rights to equality and non-discrimination, life, sexual and reproductive health rights and other human rights.”

States must respect and protect key principles of non-discrimination, equality and privacy, as well as bodily integrity, autonomy, dignity and well-being of individuals, especially in relation to sexual and reproductive health rights.

Contraceptives enable women and adolescent girls to exercise their right to decide whether to be pregnant, the number and spacing of their children and to have pleasurable and safe sexual experiences without the risk of unintended pregnancies. Contraception also improves the socioeconomic opportunities for women and open up more educational opportunities for adolescent girls.

Globally, more women (or their partners) are using contraceptive methods today than ever before. Despite great progress in extending family planning in the past decades, access to contraceptives is still insufficient and uneven.

One in ten women of reproductive age – some 270 million according to WHO estimates - have an unmet need for family planning and more than 200 million women who want to avoid pregnancy are not using modern contraception due to a range of barriers.

While contraceptive use varies across regions and women living in low and lower-middle-income countries face greater obstacles in meeting their contraception needs, access to contraception is difficult and full of barriers for women across regions experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as immigrants, women with disabilities, low-income women, and lesbian women and sex workers. For instance, Women of African descent often have difficulty accessing modern contraception methods.

In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, women and adolescent girls have been placed in heightened direct and indirect risks of unwanted and unsupportable pregnancy as a result of lockdowns, service disruptions, stockouts, financial hardships and an increased risk of in gender based violence, including sexual violence. One year into the pandemic, 12 million women may have lost access to contraception, and 1.4 million unintended pregnancies may have occurred during 2020 across 115 low and middle income countries, according to UNFPA estimates. These constraints have emerged in addition to the chronic obstacles including lack of access to information on contraception, lack of comprehensive sexuality education as well as harmful gender stereotypes and norms.

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has recognized sexual and reproductive health as entailing essential services and has stressed that States must continue to provide confidential access to gender-responsive sexual and reproductive health services, including modern forms of contraception and safe abortion and post-abortion services, as part of their COVID-19 pandemic response.

As demonstrated in several instances, contraception is not always as efficacious as indicated, and Governments and private companies should be held accountable in cases where defective contraceptives are circulated. Also, there are many cases where contraception methods fail, therefore, access to safe and legal abortion services is crucial to ensure women’s and girls’ sexual and reproductive health rights.

We deplore that emergency contraception is banned, highly restricted or simply not prioritized in many places. Victims/survivors of sexual violence should automatically be provided with emergency contraception and safe abortion procedures when a pregnancy results. This should be a standard protocol and its absence represents a violation of women’s human rights.

We also regret that the lack of funding and investment in contraception is inadequate almost everywhere. Even in wealthy nations, unaffordability and lack of insurance coverage represents a major issue and affects access for many which represents blatant discrimination. In this regard, we commend those countries who ensure free and universal access to contraceptives, in particular for adolescents and young women.

On the World Contraception Day (26 September) and the International Safe Abortion Day (28 September), we call on States to live up to their legal obligations under current human rights standards, decriminalise abortion, repeal laws prohibiting access to emergency contraception and ensure respect for and protection and fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health rights, including through the systematic inclusion of comprehensive and scientifically based sexuality education in all school curricula, also in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic”.

END

*See also press release*: [*Afghanistan: Women’s full participation in public and political life crucial for the country*](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27468&LangID=E)
*\*UN experts:* ***Ms. Tlaleng Mofokeng****,*[*Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/health/pages/srrighthealthindex.aspx)*; the* [*Working Group on discrimination against women and girls*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/Women/WGWomen/Pages/WGWomenIndex.aspx): ***Ms. Melissa Upreti****(Chair),* ***Ms. Dorothy Estrada-Tanck****(Vice-Chair),* ***Ms. Elizabeth Broderick****,* ***Ms. Ivana Radačić****,* ***and Ms. Meskerem Geset Techane****;* ***Ms.* *Reem Alsalem****,*[*Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/srwomen/pages/srwomenindex.aspx)*; and* ***Mr. Victor Madrigal-Borloz****,*[*Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity*](https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/sexualorientationgender/pages/index.aspx)*.*

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