DRAFT SOUTH AFRICAN STATEMENT

NATIONAL STATEMENT AT THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

"*Ending violence against children through health systems strengthening and multisectoral approaches*",

3 min

29 MAY 2021

WHA

GENEVA

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Chairperson,

South Africa welcomes this Resolution, considering the wide-reaching implications for children's health and wellbeing in the wake of COVID-19, notably its socio-economic impacts. While children's lives appear to have been largely spared, the indirect effects stemming from strained health systems and disruptions to life-saving health services can have devastating results.

Lockdown measures aimed at curbing the virus, have further exposed children to risks ranging from increased violence and weakened child protection and mental health services. The daily lives of girls have been overturned by the pandemic: their physical and mental health, their education, and the economic circumstances of their families and communities have been affected.

Chairperson,

Violence against children remains a critical challenge facing South African society today, despite tremendous efforts to curb this scourge. The pandemic has increased the risk of children to violence, especially those who were marginalised and vulnerable prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. The unprecedented consequences of the pandemic have threatened to undermine the progress already achieved for children, as pledged in the 2030 SDGs.

In an effort to honour its national, regional and international obligations, the government has recently approved its fourth National Plan of Action

for Children for the next five years, to highlight child rights' priorities and to provide a mechanism through which government facilitates and advances children's rights, post pandemic and into the future. Through focused policy, advocacy and intervention in child protection, and appropriate partnerships, we are determined to stop the cycle of neglect, abuse, violence and exploitation of children.

We therefore concur with the recent report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng, that sexual health is fundamental to the overall health and well-being of individuals, couples, families, and to the social and economic development of communities and countries. The Special Rapporteur recalled that, at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development , we agreed on the need to eliminate all forms of exploitation, abuse, harassment and violence against women, adolescents and children. We dare not go back on this promise.

Chairperson,

Comprehensive sexuality education, which is both inclusive and non-stigmatizing, and promotes gender equality and the rights of young people, plays a key role in the battle against sexual and gender-based violence.

I thank you.