

Committee: Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee

Issue: Addressing the issue of global bioethics and reproductive rights

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INTRODUCTION

Despite all the efforts and progress made towards gender equality in the last century, women are still one of the most vulnerable segments of our society. After many decades of efforts, policymaking and heated debate, reproductive rights still constitute a polarizing topic of great importance, and individuals have their rights questioned. Reproductive rights are not a new set of rights, but a combination of social, economic, cultural and civil rights. Therefore, they can be perceived as basic human rights. Causes related to pregnancy and childbirth result in approximately 830 deaths of women, on an everyday basis. As part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2030 Agenda), Goal no.5 aims at eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls. One of the targets is to reduce maternal mortality by 70 per 100.000 live births.

Taking into account the complexity and the importance of the issue in hand it is of the outmost importance to understand all aspects of the matter. If any inquiries arise please feel free to contact me for further information and explanations at my e-mail address (alexavrms@gmail.com).

Important note from the chairs' team

In order for the chairs to fully understand the dynamics of the committee, discovering any misunderstanding prior to the debate and for the better preparation of the delegates you are asked to proceed as indicated below;

- 1) Conduct your chairs via email and informing them about your mun experience so that they can know what exactly to expect of you.
- 2) Prepare and send your chairs by 11:59 of the 6th of November one position papers for each of the topics you are going to discuss during the conference. You can conduct the expert chair, of each topic for further information concerning your country's policy if needed, and for general guidance when it comes to your position papers (word limit structure etc). You are going to receive general comments during the lobbying for your position papers as well as personal feedback and grades for your papers. The points you will receive will add up to your general score which is one of the factors that determine the best delegate award. If you for any reason fail to send your papers before the final deadline you will not be eligible for any award.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Reproductive Health

Reproductive Health is a state of physical, mental and social well-being, relating to the reproductive system, implying that people have the capacity to reproduce freely, including their right to information and access to safe and affordable methods of family planning and healthcare services, which do not oppose to the law.

Reproductive Rights

Reproductive rights embrace values already recognised in national and international laws, documents and treaties. The world Health Organisation defines reproductive rights as follows: *"Reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes the right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents"*

Bioethics

Bioethics is the study of controversial ethical issues stemming from new situations and advancements in biology and medicine

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The situation around the world

Latin America has one of the highest rates of sexual violence against women around the world, reaching epidemic levels. Statistics and reports are making it one of the most dangerous areas, outside war zones. In North America, Gender- equal societies (e.g. Canada) stem from the realisation that the involvement of women in all endeavours address incidents of sexual violence and discriminative policies is the only way to create peaceful and prosperous communities. In Africa, we are noticing the phenomenon of armed groups, carrying out rape, sexual slavery, trafficking and other abuses against women. In Europe, countries have taken initiatives, shaping the dynamics of the region in the field of human rights, to respect sexual and reproductive rights and protect vulnerable groups and individuals that have these rights questioned. However, in some countries across Europe, people have their rights restricted as a result of laws policies and practices.

Production free of discrimination, coercion and violence

Around the world, we are noticing people and groups that are subjected to vulnerable situation or exclusion because of specific characteristics that they hold. Women, disabled, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ , have experienced discrimination in many forms. Individuals have been subject to sterilization due to their sexual orientation, or denied access to healthcare services. Women and girls in many places are experiencing female genital mutilation, early or forced marriage, and gender-based violence. When it comes to the last one, apart from violence in the private domain, sexual violence in public spaces is another under-recognised global pandemic, an everyday occurrence in developing and developed countries. Domestic violence is a phenomenon that in many places, social and religious norms tend to legitimize, when committed within marriage. Only 27 States recognize sexual violence within marriage as a crime.

Men and reproductive rights

When it comes to the reproductive rights of men, they hold the right to take responsibility for contraception and birth control, and in case they father a child, they have the right to take responsibility for the child's upbringing. Placing men as well in the forefront of our topic and engaging them in any effort is crucial, since they constitute a big part of world's population that needs to be informed and acquainted with sensitive issues, so that they can contribute to the progress. Let's not forget, that in several societies around the globe, due to religion,

cultural heritage or social norms, men play an enormous - if not exclusive - role in policymaking, as community leaders and gatekeepers of health services.

New Technologies and Reproductive Rights

Technological advancements have reduced the mortality rates and saved many lives. However, they have raised some ethical issues. Due to advances in assisted pregnancy, the HIV male partner can have children without spreading the infection. But giving this opportunity only to those who can afford such a procedure, increases the gap and the differences of the poor and the rich. Ethical issues arises from the practice of surrogacy, as well. Some countries allow commercial surrogacy (usa, India), will others don't. The argument behind the prohibition of commercial surrogacy is related to the protection of poor women, while others claim that banning that option, is a violation of their right to have control over their body.

Achieving the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health

Apart from acknowledging individuals the right to make decisions related to their reproductive health, another issue of importance is providing them access to healthcare services that would satisfy adequately their needs, not only related to children bearing, but also to securing a safe sex life. Specifically, when we are talking about access to healthcare services, we are referring to services and the existence of medical personnel that would provide safe abortion (where legal) and post abortion care, ante-natal and post-natal services (for mother and child), prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections(e.g. AIDS-HIV) etc.

The role of cultural and religious Heritage: The impact of cultural practices and religious interpretations.

Previous attempts to improve the situation universally, have not been fertile in many places of the world, where religion and culture shape the dynamics of the society. To improve this situation, many are calling the international community to employ more culturally sensitive approaches. Showing respect to the history and cultural norms of a population, rather than fighting it, is the only way to trigger change in the way of thinking by identifying and highlighting positive cultural values and principles which would facilitate progress in the field of human rights and understanding. According to the ICPD Programme of Action, the *"implementation of the*

recommendations contained in the Programme of Action is the sovereign right of each country, consistent with national laws and development priorities, with full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural backgrounds of its people, and in conformity with universally recognized international human rights. “

Religion and culture are to be considered not only as obstacles, but as potential beneficial factors. Religious structures can become great allies in this endeavour. Especially in places where religion plays a leading role in policy making, lack of collaboration with these religious figures results in limited impact.

MAJOR COUNTRIES INVOLVED

Country

United states of America

The world was taken by storm a few months ago after the new Alabama bill on abortion, banning all abortions with no exceptions. But the situation was already difficult for many people prior to the new bill. In 2014, 93% of Alabama counties had no clinics that performed abortions. Abortions are legal in the US from 1973 (Supreme court decision- *Roe v. Wade*). Yet, many other states such as Georgia and Ohio, have banned abortion after five weeks, meaning that people might lose their right to choose abortion before they even become aware of the pregnancy. Abortion opponents aim at eventually overturning the *ROE v. Wade* ruling , and take the legal challenges to the Supreme Court. Furthermore, The US has signed but not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, abortions are considered legal only in cases where the life of a woman is at risk, or in order to protect her physical and mental health.

Turkey

Abortion was legalized in Turkey in 1983, and it is legal until the 10th week after conception. However, performing an abortion is almost unavailable. Only 7,8% of the total 431 public hospitals in Turkey carry out abortions, when solely at the request of the woman. To perform abortion in private clinic is something many women cannot afford. Moreover, under the Turkish penal code, when it comes to crimes committed against women in the name of honour (“traditional crimes”) , reduced penalties are imposed.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| Date | Description of Event |
|------|--|
| 1968 | <p>The 1968 Final Act of the Tehran Conference on Human Rights, constitutes the first international document of substantial importance referring to reproductive rights. The United Nations General Assembly endorsed the Final Act in December 1968 (UNGA Resolution 2442 (XXIII)).</p> <p>Section 16: “Parents have a basic human right to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of children and a right to adequate education and information in this respect”</p> |
| 1975 | <p>The 1975 Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and their Contribution to Development and Peace under principle 12, states that <i>“every couple and every individual has the right to decide freely and responsibly whether or not to have children as well as to determine their number and spacing, and to have the information, education and means to do so”</i></p> |
| 1979 | The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination |

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|--|--|
| | <p>Against Women, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly defines as discrimination against women <i>“any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field”</i></p> |
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UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- The **Security Council resolution 1820 (2008)** highlights the fact that sexual violence in conflict zones is a matter of the UN Security Council, as it can constitute a crime of war, a crime against humanity and an act of genocide.
- The **1994 International Conference on Population Development Programme of Action**, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly
- The **Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)** recognised the nature and importance of effects from armed conflicts, on women and girls.
- **The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action** , adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, recognised women’s right “to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence” .

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The **European Union** has adopted a policy that takes initiatives and reflects the enterprising spirit of it's Nations. Cooperating with the UN, in 2018, they became a large donator of the the UN's Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls (500 million EUR).

Moreover, under Council Directive 2004/113/EC equal treatment between men and women with regard to 'access to and supply of goods and services' is to be respected and guaranteed. Directive 2011/24/EU on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, and the European Commission's Communication towards the elimination of female genital mutilation (COM/2013/0833/final) are key pieces of EU Health legislation. It is up to the member states discretion to decide when life begins and the circumstances under which to offer abortion. The ECHR does not create any concrete, clearcut right to abortion. Many cases related to reproductive rights have reached the European Court of Human Rights, most of them falling within the innovative article 8 of the ECHR. According to article 8, states must, not only refrain from violating a person's right to family life, privacy, home and correspondence, but take action to guarantee that no one else will violate these rights.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The basis of all efforts and initiatives should be raising awareness of individuals, so that they know how to protect themselves and lead a healthy existence, being aware of their body and rights. Sexuality education can teach individuals their rights and challenge stereotypical gender roles. Lack of knowledge sets the grounds for coercion, abuse, sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy. According to the ICPD Programme of Action, education on reproductive health plays a crucial role in making the difference in the field of gender equality and reproductive rights. The creation of effective and comprehensive sexuality education programmes will reduce misinformation, spread scientifically accurate information and increase communication and understanding, especially in schools, where information reaches large numbers of young people. But prior to the adoption of such policies, guidance should be provided to educational authorities, in places where institutional capacity needs to be enhanced. Therefore, we should encourage cooperation with UNICEF, Amnesty International and mainly their initiatives, as well as the adoption of educational workshops, promoting alternative forms of education with the assistance of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. At last, we should encourage global donors such as, but not limited to, the UN Foundation and the UN Children Fund, to fund and launch campaigns in order to raise awareness.

Apart from that, we should promote cooperation with the World Health Organisation. A solution of great potential is the adoption and implementation of self-care interventions for health, related to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Launched by the World Health Organisation, these interventions include self-sampling for sexually transmitted infections, self-injectable contraceptives, home-based ovulation predictor kits, HIV self-testing and self-management of medical abortion. In areas, where the conventional health sector cannot cover the needs of the marginalized people, these innovations can give a solution to certain problems. It is obvious though, that they cannot fully replace high-quality health services.

Another Key issue is the lack of healthcare facilities (hospitals, clinics) mostly in developing countries and rural areas. Capacity building is critical to preserving respectable living conditions. Calling the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to provide analyses and expertise, so that the correct infrastructure is built in the best possible way, is a solution that could bring true and sustainable results.

As for the role of the international community, we should encourage regional organizations, such as but not limited to, the African Union, the Arab League and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation to continue mainstreaming reproductive rights into their advocacy, policies, programmes, and mission planning.

Finally, engaging women in all efforts towards creating the conditions for a safer sexual and reproductive lifestyle, is the only way to sustainable healthy societies.

Points to be addressed

- What strategies can we implement, to facilitate the enforcement of women socially and economically?
- Which are your country's policies in relation to reproductive rights?
- Are there any side benefits from the protection of women's reproductive rights (e.g. in economy)?
- How can we monitor reproductive rights and minority rights at a national level, while showing respect to the country's sovereignty and culture?
- How can we take advantage of the new advancements in technology without adding more fuel to the fire of ethical issues?
- How can we protect the sexual and reproductive rights of women in conflict and post-conflict areas?

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