

THE DURBAN YOUTH DECLARATION:

Help us protect our right to health, help us protect our futures

A youth-led civil society declaration demanding access to condoms, comprehensive sex education, youth friendly clinics and sanitary pads in South African schools!

Wednesday 20th July

We, the undersigned, demand urgent action by South African Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, to make interventions to improve young girls health outcomes and ability to access education through ensuring access to condoms, comprehensive sex education and free sanitary pads in schools.

Access to Condoms in Schools:

Every week in South Africa over 2 500 young people acquire HIV – that is over 350 every day. According to a 2012 National Survey on HIV, 37.5% of learners reported having had sex, with 12.6% indicating that their first sexual encounter occurred before the age of 14. These are young people at schools across the country. Furthermore, HIV prevalence among young women is reported at being nearly twice as high as young men. Rates of new infections among young women aged 15-24 were more than four times greater than that of men in the same age range – accounting for 25% of new infections in South Africa.

South Africa responded to its HIV epidemic with a rapid expansion of its condom distribution programme. This is to be commended. Male condoms are widely available and the female condom programme is one of the biggest in the world. However, condom, especially female condoms, often remain out of reach to the most at risk group – young people and in particular young women.

The voice of young people is not being heard as older people, leaders and service providers decide on how we should access sexual and reproductive health services. It is difficult for us to access these services. It is too late in the day to attend clinic after school. Where we do get to the clinic, we do not get quality comprehensive services because we are attended to by older healthcare workers who judge us when we want condoms, and sometimes deny us access to contraceptives.

We need youth friendly clinics that collaborates all services to promote adherence to those already infected with HIV/AIDS. We need youth friendly clinics that are approachable, accessible and safe.

This is a violation of our rights, in terms of section 28 of the Constitution which gives every child the right to access health care services and section 27 which guarantees everyone the right to access to healthcare services including reproductive health care. These violation particularly places young women particularly in the way of the harm of HIV. How can you allow this?

How can the South African government have a comprehensive strategy on preventing HIV and STIs while denying access to its young people?

We are sexually active human beings. We need to be respected as such. We demand that the right to access to healthcare services, including reproductive health care, be respected by those in power. We request that Minister Motsoaledi commit to today to ensuring that our rights are respected by the departments of Health and Basic Education.

We, young people spend most of our daily time in schools, we engage in sexual activities at school. If we are denied our rights to reproductive healthcare we risk falling pregnant at school. If we get pregnant, or infected with HIV or an STI we end up missing classes and this contributes to our poor academic performance. If we lose out at school we pay for the rest of our lives.

Access to Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PreEP) alone is not enough, we need health care services that are young people friendly in our own comfort spaces. We firmly believe It is the moral and Constitutional responsibility of the government to provide such services.

Are you serious about HIV prevention? If you are we demand condoms in schools now!

Access to Sanitary Pads in Schools:

Every week of the month, thousands of young girls in South Africa between the ages of 13 and 19 remain home from school when they are menstruating because they cannot afford to buy sanitary pads. These young girls miss almost two months of school each year as a result. In 2016, it is unacceptable that girls will drastically worsen their academic performance just because we cannot afford something as simple as a sanitary pad. No special arrangements are made to provide them by the National Department of Basic Education or National Department of Health.

All we ask is to get access to free sanitary pads in schools. Sanitary pads are prohibitively expensive. The companies that make them, like Kimberley Clarke and Johnson and Johnson, sell them at prices that deny us dignity and basic needs. They make profits and damn the rest of us.

We are tired of using old smelly cloths that needs to be washed every day. If the powers that be respect the South African Constitution, now is the time for them to make such commitments or forever be responsible for the massive harm you doing to our futures and our education and job prospects.

We want a government that treats girls and young women with equality, that respects our dignity.

If you can get free male condoms in every shebeen, every garage, at sports grounds and even go door to door distributing these why don't we do the same to encourage and invest in young girls to stay at school and study, become successful and take care of the next generation?

Why do young women have to be at the receiving end when it comes to building their self-esteem, self-confidence and hygiene promotion?

While we acknowledge the recent launch of the National HIV Prevention Campaign we call on the manufacturers of sanitary pads, government and development partners to help us stretch those efforts beyond just prevention by providing us with free sanitary pads in schools. We demand this now. No more easy promises.

We are not confused by sending this memo to you today, for section 7 of the Constitution of our country states that all government officials must respect, protect and promote the rights in the Bill of Rights. Failure to provide condoms in schools, youth friendly clinics and sanitary pads means you are the cause of 2500 infections among the youth per week and you are the cause of 7 million girl learners missing school every month. We demand that the barriers to accessing healthcare and these barriers to learning be immediately addressed.

Signed By:

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