

MWIA POSITION STATEMENTS

Sydney April 2001

WOMEN, GIRLS AND HIV/AIDS

Medical Women's International Association (MWIA) recognizes that the worldwide pandemic of HIV/AIDS is a threat to every sphere of human society. MWIA recognises HIV/AIDS as a global health emergency. Gender-based discrimination against women and girls, de facto and de jure, renders them extraordinarily vulnerable, and disproportionately at risk from this condition.

This hazard to the physical and mental health of girls and women arises from gendered social, political and economic determinants, as well as biologic differences. Moreover, HIV/AIDS multiplies the burden of caring imposed on women and girls by their traditional roles.

MWIA recognises that in the context of the crisis of HIV, the human rights and health of girls and women clearly converge, and that inequalities fuel this epidemic.

MWIA believes that health is a human right, and that girls and women must have full human rights and freedoms, in equality with boys and men, in order to exercise their right to protect themselves from HIV infection and the devastating effects of the epidemic.

MWIA notes with alarm that violence against girls and women is both cause and effect of HIV, and that poverty is both cause and effect of HIV for girls and women.

MWIA believes that an emphasis on human rights is central to effective work and policies dealing with HIV/AIDS and imposes an obligation on both state and non-state actors to ensure that the human rights of girls and women are fully respected and protected and that gender inequalities are eradicated in both the public and private spheres of their lives. Promotion and protection of the sexual and reproductive rights of girls and women is critical to confronting the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Therefore, MWIA calls on governments, the UN System, civil society and individuals, to:

1. Implement at all levels the international guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights, with particular attention to the rights of girls and women, and
2. Empower girls and women by ensuring, de facto and de jure, that they are free from discrimination and enjoy access to education, sex education including education on sexual and reproductive rights and responsibilities, and life skills, beginning in the primary grades, to employment, to economic independence, to health information and services to ensure informed health choices, and the benefits of scientific progress, in equality with boys and men, and
3. Ensure that all data gathered from science, research and public health, clinical practice and other relevant sources is gender and age disaggregated, in order to accurately and visibly represent the situation experience and needs of girls and women in the context of HIV/AIDS, and

4. Enable early access for individuals with HIV/AIDS, especially women and girls, to scientifically validated, affordable interventions, including preventions, treatments, and services.
5. Guarantee access to clean water and infrastructure, allowing the exercise of alternatives for prevention and treatment of HIV infection.
6. Begin active campaigns involving the media directly to eradicate myths and stigma and stereotypes, that degrade and dehumanize girls and women, and so enhance the hazards to their mental and physical health, and Review, revise and reform laws, policies, and practices to make them consistent with human rights and fundamental freedoms for girls and women, in equality with boys and men, and implement these health promoting changes on an urgent basis.
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MATERNAL HEALTH

Despite international recognition of and commitment to the Safe Motherhood Initiative, there remain great inequities in maternal health care Provision not only between nations, but between urban and rural communities and between different cultural groups.

MWIA recognises that maternal morbidity and mortality is preventable and calls on all governments, international agencies, and health professionals to fulfil their obligations and commitments to implement and finance the Safe Motherhood Initiatives. The implementation of safe motherhood initiatives should be informed by research to ensure their appropriateness and effectiveness. Continued quality improvement should be an integral part of the management of reproductive health services.

THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

MWIA continues to receive reliable reports from Afghanistan of increased abuses and violations of the human rights of girls and women by the Taleban militia, particularly their freedom and rights to education and employment, and the progressive deterioration of the physical and mental health of girls and women who are specifically denied access to health services and humanitarian aid.

The Taleban militia demonstrate contempt for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the common moral vision of the International community by continuing to subject girls and women to egregious and progressively severe cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment with devastating physical and mental health consequences, particularly for women physicians who are prohibited from the practice of their profession.

Credible reports confirm that the Taleban continue to compel women and children, otherwise, in virtual captivity, to witness public beheadings, amputations, floggings and other inhumane and cruel executions of punishments. MWIA states that this Taleban coercion does extreme harm to the mental health of these helpless witnesses, creates a climate of terror and produces a devastating, disabling degree of despair for the future in women and children.

MWIA strongly condemns the pattern, policy, and practices of extreme and escalating violations of the human rights of girls and women by the Taleban, who demonstrate a callous disregard for lives and needs of the majority of the Afghanistan population, girls and women.

MWIA demands that the complete restoration of the human rights of girls and women be a precondition for any and all negotiations with and involvement of the Taleban militia in any legitimate international, multinational financial development matters.

MWIA demands that women shall be proportionally represented by women at any peace plans and negotiations for Afghanistan and that the full and immediate restoration of human rights and fundamental freedoms for girls and women, particularly the right of women physicians to freely practice their profession, and the restoration of free and unfettered access to health care and health services and to education be a precondition to the initiation of any international peace or financial development process.