

**ACT Alliance briefing paper**

# **COMMITMENTS TOWARDS ICPD + 25**

**actalliance**

Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance) is a coalition of 155 churches and church-related organisations working together in over 125 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards.

**[www.actalliance.org](http://www.actalliance.org)**

## **Briefing paper**

### **ACT Alliance's Commitments towards ICPD + 25 - Nairobi**

Action by Churches Together (ACT Alliance) is a coalition of 155 churches and church-related organisations working together in over 125 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards. ACT Alliance is faith-motivated, rights-based, impact focused, committed to working ecumenically and inter-religiously, with the communities we seek to serve and accompany at the centre of our work.

As networks of churches and Christian faith-based organisations working for human rights, sustainable development and humanitarian purposes around the world, we are engaged in all pillars of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

ACT Alliance believes in an end to gender inequality and injustice, gender-based discrimination and violence, and in closing the gender gap and addressing unequal power relationships for the promotion of human dignity for all.

We believe that in order to guarantee comprehensively and effectively the enjoyment of human rights, we must accelerate the promises enshrined in the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and ensure the full implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA). We will work to encourage all stakeholders: multilateral agencies, civil society, academia, the faith based sector and above all, governments to commit to the commitments of the Summit to accelerate the promise of the ICPD PoA.

We recognize that the ICPD Programme of Action and regional reviews, including the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, are key frameworks that promote a dignified life for all people. They are in full congruence with our Christian values and our rights-based approach.<sup>1</sup> We also support the Statement and Commitments for the Nairobi Summit<sup>2</sup> as crucial in ensuring: (i) zero unmet need for family planning; (ii) zero preventable maternal deaths; (iii) zero gender-based violence and harmful practices against women, girls and youth; (iv) zero

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, <https://www.oursplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/CRR-Religious-Voices-Worldwide-Support-Choice-Briefing-Paper.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.nairobisummiticpd.org/content/icpd25-commitments>

sexual and gender-based violence, including zero child, early and forced marriage, as well as; (v) zero female genital mutilation, in order to realize all individuals' potential as agents of change in their society – both socially and economically.

## **MAIN AREAS OF CONCERN**

As churches and faith-based organisations with a long history of accompanying communities in vulnerable situations, we are concerned about the persistent violations of the rights of women and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ community. We are equally concerned about how that links to a broader profiling of human rights defenders, particularly those addressing the gender equality gaps and challenging the setbacks in gender equality and acquired human rights.

We denounce the trends of fundamentalisms (religious, political and economic) which promote messages that are incompatible with human rights and enable the maintenance of power structures that only serve a few privileged individuals and groups. The Gospel according to Luke urges us to be humble and not to regard others with contempt (Luke 18:9-14). For this reason, we also reprehend all speech and practice perpetrated or condoned by those reinforcing sexist stereotypes that go against women's rights, sexual diversity, tolerance and love.

ACT Alliance's 2018 public statement on gender justice affirmed that we must all *'engage in a continuous dialogue, based on love, trust transparency [...] to strive towards a change in societal norms, harmful attitudes about gender roles, including masculinities, reproductive choices, human sexuality, child marriage, and stigmatisation of HIV and AIDS [...] for mutual learning and a better realisation of gender justice and sexual reproductive health rights.'*

We worry that low conditions of access and quality of sexual and reproductive health services affect indigenous women, afro-descendants, and other historically marginalised groups in a disproportionate way leading to high rates of maternal mortality and teenage pregnancy amongst individuals that are part of these same groups. Similarly, we highlight that migrant women are also at risk of not having their sexual and reproductive rights met.

## **ACT COMMITMENTS**

### **“Faith actors as transformative actors for the ICPD PoA”**

ACT Alliance is committed to and engaged with other faith-based organisations, coalitions and alliances:

**Commitment 1:** To scale up efforts to implement the ACT Alliance Gender Justice policy which will support the implementation of ICPD PoA, ensuring access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and protection from Gender-Based Violence. This includes adoption of protocols for the prevention, detection and attention to sexual and gender-based violence inside churches and faith based organisations.

**Commitment 2:** To promote and strengthen strategies for pastoral and community actions in coordination with different stakeholders, in the prevention, reduction and eradication of preventable maternal/child deaths through increased access to quality SRHR-services and information. The alliance members are committed to engage in dialogue based on love, trust and transparency to strive towards a change in societal norms, and harmful attitudes related to gender roles.

**Commitment 3:** To promote awareness and information strategies for overcoming existing taboos and resistance in addressing comprehensive sexuality education in churches.

**Commitment 4:** To strive towards a change in societal norms, harmful attitudes related to gender roles and work on critical theological understandings, that deconstruct gender stereotypes, promote women’s rights, bodily integrity and agency, and contribute to equality and justice for all genders.

**Commitment 5:** To stand up for the integrity of the United Nations and the importance of multilateralism and cooperation at times of polarisation by strengthening and deepening our existing partnerships with UN Women and UNFPA globally and regionally. This will be done by continual engagement at the ICPD, in the global policy arena, and supporting regional and local ACT members to engage in ICPD through their policy and programme work.

**Commitment 6:** Disaggregate the ICPD PoA as it constitutes a range of issues on which there are more common positions than contentious ones. We commit to

listen, while acknowledging the plurality of perspectives. These efforts require continuing a critical approach and dialogue on the intersections of religion and culture.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As network of churches and faith-based organisations with presence, experience and existing engagement across the globe and with the capacity to accelerate the achievement of the goals of the ICPD Programme of Action and its subsequent regional and global reviews, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals - in particular SDG 3, 5, 10 and 16 - we encourage all governments and other stakeholders to commit to:

- Supporting the Nairobi Summit's commitment to *'integrate sexual and reproductive health into Universal Health Coverage [UHC] at primary health care level, equalising access, improving quality and enhancing accountability. A particular focus on ensuring access for adolescents due to the vulnerabilities, needs and rights of adolescents and to harness the demographic dividend.*
- Recognizing and addressing the interconnection, interrelatedness and interdependence between sexual and reproductive health, human rights and Sustainable Development Goals and supporting a holistic development agenda that puts human rights and human dignity front and center.
- Engaging religious actors to ensure accountability, functioning private-public partnerships, mutual transparency and inclusion in decision-making. While recognising the primary role of the state, there is also the pivotal role faith-based actors play in provision of UHC, as providers of education and health care services-- in some national contexts comprising up to 50% of health-care provision. Faith-based actors and institutions have networks and access to marginalised communities where governments have difficulty ensuring an institutional presence and have the potential to reach those furthest left behind.
- Recognising that domestic resource mobilisation is a vital method to secure sustainable financing for UHC, governments have a duty to use a combination of domestic resource mobilisation primarily through progressive taxation and to ensure public investment in key areas, such as education and social protection, that contribute to the realisation of women's rights and achievement of UHC. In financing health services, there needs to be equity in the use of existing resources and a reduced reliance on out-of-pocket payments by those living in poverty. Faith actors often are

the ones providing those services to the most marginalised. National governments should increase their investment in health and meet commitments such as the Africa Union's Abuja 15% allocation of annual budget to health.

- Protecting and fulfilling access to UHC for all persons, regardless of nationality, migration status, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, ethnicity or any other intersecting identity.
- Engaging churches and faith-based organisations as transformative actors in this agenda, recognising and holding faith accountable as holding important ethical values that promote abundant life and dignity of all human beings which encompass justice, compassion and love at its core and the implementation of the ICPD PoA as part of ensuring that which is all our moral imperative, that “no-one is left behind”.