



## A BOLD AND INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

### Statement by the International Women's Health Coalition on the occasion of the 73rd World Health Assembly

**Written statements exceptionally considered under provisional agenda item 3** Address by WHO Director-General devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic response in advance of the opening of the Health Assembly

COVID-19 has had devastating consequences for women, girls and gender non-conforming people, especially the most marginalized. Immediate responses and long-term recovery must be gender-responsive, human rights-based, and centered on public health.

Access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and exercise of sexual and reproductive rights have been disrupted by COVID-19. UNFPA projects 47 million women in 114 low- and middle-income countries will lack modern contraceptives if COVID-19-related disruptions continue for 6 months, leading to millions of unintended pregnancies. Governments must:

- Designate SRH services as essential; ensure uninterrupted access, including for maternal health, contraception, and abortion.
- Implement WHO's Consolidated Guidelines on Self-Care Interventions for Health & expand telemedicine.
- Secure supply chains to avoid stockouts in SRH commodities.
- Invest in and strengthen SRH services as part of UHC.

Gender-based violence increased with COVID-19, with many women, girls and LGBTQ people trapped in violent households. Governments must:

- Allocate resources for gender-based violence survivors as part of emergency responses.
- Designate shelters for survivors of violence as essential; ensure hotlines, legal and medical support remain accessible, particularly where movement is restricted.

Women are on the frontline of the crisis as the majority of health and social care workers, and providing unpaid family care. Governments must:

- Provide all workers with safe and decent jobs, effective personal protective equipment, psycho-social support, childcare, and social protection, to enable them to respond without risking lives.

Member States must engage women in all aspects of decision-making on COVID-19 response and recovery, including gender impact assessments.

We commend WHO's leadership in coordinating the COVID-19 response and providing clear, science-based guidance. We urge Member States to meet funding commitments for all of WHO's work.

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