Menstrual hygiene, painful menstruation and endometriosis: a human rights issue and key challenge for rural women and girls

Wednesday, the 14th of March
8:15 to 9:30 a.m.
Room CR12, United Nations Headquarters

CSW 62 side-event
co-sponsored by France, Senegal and India

Organized by Info-Endométriose, France
co-organized by Femmes Solidaires and Le Planning Familial, France

With the participation of UNESCO and WHO
And the support avec the French Embassy in Burkina Faso

Speakers:

- Mrs. Marlene SCHIAPPA, Secretary of State for gender equality, France
- Mrs. Salimata DIOP DIENG, Minister for Women, Family and Gender, Senegal
- Mrs. Maneka Sanjay GANDHI, Minister for Women and Child Development, India
- Mrs. Saniye Gülser CORAT, Director of the Gender Equality Division, UNESCO
- Dr. Claudia GARCIA-MORENO, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, WHO
- Mrs. Jenni SAWYER, Programme Officer SRHR, SIMAVI, Netherlands
- Mrs. Aminata DIALLO, President of MAIA BOBO, Burkina Faso

Moderator:

- Dr. Chrysoula ZACHAROPOULOU, President of Info-Endométriose, France

Background:

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a major issue for girls and women of reproductive age concerning sexual and reproductive rights. Nevertheless, menstruation is often a silenced topic leaving many women and girls without the information and support they need, in order to participate fully and equally in society without discrimination. Women and girls face strong constraints (social norms, geographical or economic access to hygiene
products) in the management of their menstruations and periods remain a universal taboo. Negative social norms about periods are conveyed in all societies. Therefore, it is important to create an enabling environment for the menstrual hygiene management for the well-being of women and girls.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Hygiene and Drinking Water reaffirmed that: "Periods are an integral and normal part of human life, of human existence, and menstrual hygiene is fundamental to the dignity and well-being of women, as well as a significant part of the basic hygiene and reproductive health that every woman is entitled to."

Today, many women and girls are still deprived of access to basic menstrual information and basic menstrual hygiene products. Most live in rural areas. The barriers to information about menstruations and access to menstrual hygiene have an impact on the health, education and employment of women and girls and undermine their dignity, well-being and fundamental rights.

Menstrual hygiene management requires the ability to access and use clean equipment that can be changed privately and safely as often as necessary. This includes access to essential menstrual hygiene information, products and facilities. This also includes taking into account of painful menstruations and of the diagnosis of endometriosis.

The 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2018, with its priority theme on “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”, provides a critical opportunity to take measures for sensitizing in the international community on menstruations, menstrual hygiene challenges and generating innovative ideas for solutions.

Objectives:

1) Take stock of the situation of menstrual hygiene management over the world and raise awareness in the international community on its consequences on women and girls, especially in rural areas.

2) Propose options to improve the information, including through comprehensive sexuality education on puberty, reproductive health, about periods, menstrual hygiene, painful menstruations and endometriosis and its consequences at global, national and local level. Taboos, discrimination and cultural prejudices are a major obstacle to information and public awareness and can be better addressed by the education sector.

3) Develop action-oriented recommendations to ensure that menstrual hygiene management is systematically taken into account in schools and workplace.

4) To identify options for initiating a global momentum on menstrual hygiene management, painful menstruations and endometriosis.