



Statement

Commemorating International Safe Abortion Day

28th September 2018

“Addressing barriers to adolescent girls’ and women’s access to abortion in the region and globally is a matter of urgency. Restrictive legislative frameworks and criminalisation of abortion does not prevent abortion. It only renders it unsafe and threatening to health and lives. The high incidence of mortality due to unsafe abortions is unnecessary loss of life. This can easily be prevented when adolescent girls and women’s decisions and choices over their bodies are respected & EVERYONE commits to protect the rights, health, safety and well-being of millions of adolescent girls and women in SADC.

SAfAIDS remains highly committed to promoting access to safe abortions for adolescent girls and young women. We advocate for a positive policy environment and effective service delivery for improved sexual and reproductive health and rights outcomes. The time is right to positively transform the lives of our African adolescent girls and women. It is Time for Change and Time for Action” ~ SAfAIDS Executive Director, Mrs Lois Chingandu

September 28th is celebrated globally as International Safe Abortion Day since 2011, and to mark the movement towards decriminalisation of abortion since 1990. The Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR), among other global networks and movements continues to call to action all key stakeholders to raise awareness and increase advocacy efforts towards making safe abortion a reality for all women and girls across the globe. As commemorations of the Day have evolved, so has the women’s movement on reproductive rights prior to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD 1994) to the current era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; Agenda 2030). There has been great positive increase in commitment across sectors to improve policies safeguarding women’s access to comprehensive reproductive health and rights services and information. However, according to the Guttmacher Institute Abortion Worldwide (2017 Report), as of 2017, 42% of women of reproductive age live in the 125 countries where abortion is highly restricted, prohibited altogether, or allowed only to save a woman’s life or protect her health. This still poses a threat to women and girls’ health and lives, fuelling unsafe abortions, with an estimated over 25 million unsafe abortion occurring each year.

As 28th September is commemorated globally, SAfAIDS recognises past and current global, regional and local efforts advocating adolescent girls and women’s access to safe abortion.

SAfAIDS however notes with great concern the increasing retrogressive and punitive legislative frameworks and policies denying women's access to safe abortion and freedom of choice, criminalising abortion, and limiting access to comprehensive reproductive rights and health, contributing to high rates of morbidity and mortality, particularly in developing countries. Additionally, the Mexico City Policy (Global Gag Rule) reinstated in 2017 only served to worsen the plight of adolescent girls and women - through denied full bodily autonomy and agency, and restricted access to comprehensive reproductive health services, including safe abortion.

It is against this background that SAfAIDS and its partners in SADC are buttressing efforts to promote adolescent girls and women's access to comprehensive safe abortion information and services. Through its *Regional Transforming Lives* programme, SAfAIDS is working towards transforming the policy environment to accelerate access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) by adolescent girls and young women, including countering the practice of unsafe abortions. The initiative aligns with continental, regional and national SRHR commitments and frameworks outlining the States' duty to positively transform the lives of women and girls in the region in line with the SDGs, Africa Agenda 2063 and Maputo Plan of Action.

Additionally, SAfAIDS continues to strengthen the capacity of young people, and regional youth organisations and networks in social accountability monitoring of the delivery of youth-friendly SRH information and services in the region, to promote SADC Member States' commitment to implementation of SRH policies and frameworks.

The war on and politicisation of women's bodies continues. Denying women and girls full enjoyment of fundamental human rights and reaching their fullest potential is short-lived. Our call is for continuous sustained advocacy for and action towards promoting access to safe abortion throughout the year - and not just on 28th September - to reduce adverse consequences of unsafe abortion on adolescent girls and women's health and well-being. When they are denied access to effective contraception and safe abortion services, they are at risk of poor health outcomes, have reduced productivity, and the well-being of their families and development of their communities is staggered.

***Join the 28th September Movement,
Raise Your Voices on Safeguarding Adolescent Girl's and
Women's Health, and
Commit to Saving Lives!***

Knowledge for Action: The Power to Make a Difference!