Subject: Recommendations for the 2007 World Development Report on Youth

Dear Mr. Laryea,

I am writing in response to the Draft Outline of the ‘World Development Report on Youth’ released by the World Bank in December 2005. As interested stakeholders from the global development community we are happy to share our comments with you about the Report.

Before giving our specific comments we would first like to applaud the World Bank’s decision to focus on youth as we believe this is a subject area that is of vital importance and one that fails to receive the attention it deserves. As you may be aware, IPPF is the world’s largest non-governmental organization in this field, working to support people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in 183 countries worldwide. We believe we are particularly well qualified to comment on this subject as the SRHR of young people is one IPPF’s top priorities and a subject on which we have had a leadership position for many years.

In commenting on the draft outline please note that we also support the submission made by YouAct, the Youth Coalition and the World Population Foundation. Not only do we support their comments but would like to take them further.

Indeed, we believe that one of the major obstacles to reducing poverty is the lack of attention paid by the development community to the sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of young people. As you will be aware, more than half of those newly infected with HIV are between the ages of 15 and 24; globally, complications of pregnancy, abortion, and childbirth are the leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19; approximately five million unsafe abortions occur among adolescent girls age 15-19 each year and between 30% and 60% of young women in developing countries are married by age 20.
In addition to that which has already been mentioned by YouAct, the Youth Coalition and the World Population Foundation, we would like to add the following comments to the headings below:

1. **Promotion of Youth Participation**

IPPF believes that the report should highlight the need to work in full partnership with young people. IPPF encourages young people to participate fully within our decision-making processes. We have a long history of working with young people and 20 per cent of our Governing Council members are under the age of 24. We have witnessed a shift from relying solely on the peer education approach as a means of reaching young people to building young people’s skills and involving them at all levels of the Federation. This framework has been duplicated throughout all of IPPF’s Regional Offices and a large number of our Member Associations. To increase youth participation at the programmatic level of the Federation, Youth Action Movements (YAM) has been established by young people in both the African and Western Hemisphere Regions. These bring together young people and peer educators and provide a forum for them to define their priorities and their role within the programmes of their own associations and the Federation as a whole. This “inter-generational dialogue,” even though just in its early days, already has had a great impact at all levels and has changed the attitudes of our membership towards young people. For example, IPPF is listening to their critical voices – although that has not been always easy. Young people have brought in new ways of thinking about their needs, their views on life, sexuality, and how they believe SRH needs and rights should be addressed at all levels of the Federation. Young people in IPPF have become much more confident to speak openly and without fear because we have invested time and effort in building their capacity to become advocates. At the same time, efforts are still needed to build the capacity of adults to listen to young people and to work together with them to improve our programmes.

Another important element for the report to concentrate on is to recognize that if we really want to promote youth participation within development, we must acknowledge that we should not just concentrate on training youth but must also concentrate on raising the awareness of youth issues among adults. We must recognize that such issues should not be contained within a specific ‘youth agenda’, but be seen to be included within, and form a central part of, the wider development agenda.
2. **Access to reproductive health services and supplies**

The report should also highlight that:

- The quantity of services available to youth must be matched by the quality of these services. This necessitates increasing the knowledge and improving the understanding of service providers about the service and supply needs of young people (for example in the development of the relationship between the client and the service provider).

- SRH information, supplies and services for Young People must be as readily available as those that are available to adults, in the short term, and universally available by 2015.

- There must be a better understanding of the importance of ‘youth friendly’ services among health service providers and a determination to ensure that such services are readily available.

- ‘Youth friendly’ service delivery is about providing services based on a comprehensive understanding of what young people in that particular society/community need and want, rather than on what providers believe they need, and on an understanding of, and respect for, the realities of young people’s diverse sexual and reproductive lives. It is about establishing a service which young people trust and feel is there for them and their needs. It is also important to realize that a young person’s use of a service depends not only on his/her ability to access the services but on their perceived need and knowledge of available services. Therefore, a necessary part of youth friendly service provision is awareness among the providers of the special difficulties that young people face in terms of accessing sexual and reproductive health services. For example, inconvenient hours, legal and policy hurdles, concerns about confidentiality, fear of discrimination (in particular among sexually active girls), being treated with disrespect, and high costs are among the factors that can curtail young people’s ability to access services. Providers should be especially trained to work competently, sensitively and respectfully with adolescents/young people on their sexual and reproductive health needs, and opportunities should be made available for adolescents/young people to be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes.

- Sexually active adolescents need safe and effective contraception. Studies show that large numbers of teens are sexually active, at least occasionally. Young people still have a lot of misconceptions on prevention of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (the most common reasons given by adolescents for not using contraception are 1) believing that the risk of pregnancy is small, and 2) failing to anticipate that they were
about to have intercourse. Myths around contraceptives need to be addressed via straight, unbiased, clear information. But providers have biases as well. An example is emergency contraception (EC) where many providers still believe that EC encourages promiscuity and sexual irresponsibility among young people despite the fact that there is no evidence to support such a conclusion.

- Young people are sexual beings and have the right to a happy, healthy sex life. However, they are not a homogeneous group but a diverse population – their individual social, cultural and economic circumstances have a direct impact on their sexual and reproductive wellbeing. Young people living with HIV/AIDS, for example, can often be stigmatized by society – damaging their self esteem and compromising their sexual health.
- Marginalized youth (including street children, refugees and migrants) may be at particular risk because of stigma, unprotected sex (in exchange for food, protection or money) and drugs. Many young people still don’t know enough about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, or how to protect themselves. Our experience shows that reaching out to young people is not as simple as “ABC (“Abstain, Be faithful and use a Condom”). Understanding young people’s particular vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, how and why they use condoms, and how safer sex messages can address the complicated realities of young people’s lives: these are among our most complex challenges.

IPPF strongly supports the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people by encouraging positive attitudes towards young people’s sexuality and creating an ‘enabling environment’ within which young people are able to realize their sexual and reproductive rights.

3. **Integration of HIV/AIDS and Sexual and Reproductive Health**

While we agree with what has been mentioned by YouAct, the Youth Coalition and the World Population Foundation, we would also like to add that while ‘prevention’ is extremely important; we must ensure that the report mentions:

- the SRHR needs of young people living with HIV/AIDS. We must adapt current services and information to ensure that young people living with HIV/AIDS can live sexually fulfilled lives; and that
- care and treatment programmes for young people living with HIV/AIDS are ‘youth friendly’.
4. **Access to Accurate information**

Another important element for the report to concentrate on is accurate information, specifically to ensure that:

- SRHR education is incorporated into mainstream education from an early age as a means of reducing poverty;

- There is active participation of others (parents, carers, peers, clinics, etc.) in the development of such education programmes; and that

- sexuality education is not just be seen as a tool to reduce unwanted teenage pregnancies and STD and HIV infections but also promotes a more holistic approach that includes an emphasis on sexual expression and sexual fulfillment and pleasure.

The mainstay of IPPF’s work with adolescents remains comprehensive rights-based sexuality education. We recognize that sexuality education is a complex task, which involves being honest and acknowledging the pleasures of sex as well as its risks. The goal of our comprehensive sexuality education programmes is to use modern, accurate information to help young people develop the skills and confidence to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

5. **Gender equality, young women and girls**

A focus in the report on gender equality also necessitates an examination of the difficulties/challenges that young men face, the fact that they have specific, and often different, sexual and reproductive health needs (many of which are often neglected), and that their involvement as partners is central to the success of efforts to address gender inequities, and to empower young women and girls. This broader conceptualization of gender equality would include a focus within the WDR on the following areas:

1. how gender inequities also affect young men, in other words, how to address young men’s own sexual and reproductive health needs and the challenges they face;

2. the benefits (such as improved health and development outcomes) of involving young men in the sexual and reproductive health of young women and girls;

3. highlighting the essential role that young men have to play in the promotion of gender
equality, and providing spaces and opportunities for young men to fulfill this role and challenge often negative stereotypes.

We must also make sure that the report highlights all forms of gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation, child marriage and sexual violence.

Finally, the report should recognize the importance of the effects of culture on young people. In some countries cultural taboos make it very difficult to establish policies and programmes that address the reality of young people’s sexual and reproductive lives. Young people often face contradictions between cultural values, religious beliefs and their life circumstances. Religion is an important and prominent force. In many societies religious leaders and institutions promote human rights. However, some use religion or cultural values to justify violations of human rights, including SRHR. It is important to understand the role of the global media, that can be seen as both a positive and a negative force.

I do hope the above comments are useful and I very much look forward to hearing from you in due course. Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Steven W. Sinding
Director General