COMMINIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF 5-DAYS CONFERENCE ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS FOR YOUTH IN GHANA, HELD ON AUGUST 9TH - 13TH, 2017 AT TAMALE GIRLS SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (PAGNAA) IN TAMALE

We young people from five Regions in Ghana; Northern, Greater Accra, Ashanti, Brong Ahafo and Upper East Regions have mobilised each other to the number of 217 within the ages of 15 to 25 years for five days conference on our sexual and reproductive health needs. This conference was organised by NORSAAC in collaboration with government agencies like National Youth Authority, Ghana Health Service and Ghana Education Service and other civil society organisations; Youth Empowerment for Life, and Global Platform Ghana-ActionAid. It was funded by RFSU, OXFAM, SIMAVI, Plan International Ghana and held at Tamale Girls Senior High School (Pagnaa) in Tamale from 9th -13th August 2017. This conference dubbed NORGHA 2017 focused on; comprehensive sexuality education, comprehensive abortion care, Family planning services, youth friendly services and youth literacy in Ghana. The theme for the conference was “Promoting peaceful Environment for enhanced Sexual and Reproductive Health Education and service for young people”. The conference among others aimed at creating a safe space for youth to critically reflect on policy gaps, reflect on youth friendly solutions and to engage service providers on the desired change for enhanced youth friendly services.

Having deliberated on the policy environment and the practice of service delivery for young people reproductive health needs, we draw the attention of his Excellency the President of Ghana through the Northern Regional Minister, Honorable Salifu Saeed on the following issues;

- There is inadequate monitoring, evaluation and supervision of infrastructures available to provide services for young people

- Inability of health providers to understand the health needs of the Physically challenged especially the deaf and dumb due to language barriers

- Teachers skills on comprehensive sexuality education have not been recognised as a relevant course at the teacher training institutions resulting

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in the low knowledge, skills and information of teachers on Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Coupled with this, current subjects of the Ghana Education Service curriculum have little content on comprehensive sexuality education thus limiting students’ awareness of their bodies.

- In many cases, teachers found as culprit of sexual harassment are not disciplined by relevant authorities. Consequently, the rate of teenage pregnancy, child marriages, rape, defilement is still rampant in many schools. Yet the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit is not available in all districts and are not well resource to responds to cases of violence.

- Non-functional counselling units in the various schools contributes greatly to the effects of sexual and reproductive health issues that students are bedevilled with.

- There is still a significant number of unfriendly health care service providers who push young people away from health centers leaving us vulnerable to peer misguidance. Yet nothing is done to health care providers who deny young people services or are not friendly to them when they visit health centers.

- Unavailability of some essential family planning commodities in the country. This is coupled with inadequate capacity building for health personnel to administer the services to clients at the health centers due to funding challenges.

- Most youth friendly centers are just structures without adequate personnel and materials to deliver the required services.

- Safe abortion services are unaffordable hence increasing the rate of risky and unsafe abortions.

- Students do not have access to libraries to improve their reading and literacy skills. Many schools do not also have infrastructure that promotes teaching and learning.

We do acknowledge that young people lack the interest to push for the effective implementation of appropriate policies that will reduce these issues, but we

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believe in the power of democracy where the chosen leaders must deliver the required services of the citizens.
Honorable Minister, it was not so long ago when you were young. We are sure you faced similar issues as we are facing today. Does it need to continue? And for how long do the young people of Ghana need to face these issues?
We therefore demand that;

1. Parliament must make or amend policies to ensure conformity in the definition of youth as well as guidelines and protocols that ministries use in providing services to young people in Ghana.

2. The Ministry of Health must be directed to ensure that the construction plan for every health facility must include a youth friendly center and should be equipped with essential equipment, personnel and materials for effective service provision to young people.

3. The patient charter must be made visible at all health facilities and health personnel should be well educated on the charter by the Ministry of health.

4. Policy restriction on the category of health personnel who should provide certain health services can be reduced with effective rationalization of health personnel at health facilities, especially at youth centers. In addition, referral systems of cases should be effective among health institutions

5. The Ministry of Education must ensure that Parent-teacher Associations and School Management Committee must be effective. Heads of Schools must be accordingly directed to use Parent-Teacher Association to educate and encourage parents to speak and allow education on sexuality for children.

6. There must be defined refresher trainees for all health service providers on service provision for young people.

7. The Ministry for Health and that of Education must be directed to ensure that sign language becomes an examinable course in both health personnel and teacher training institutes.

8. Comprehensive Sexuality Education must be incorporated into the curriculum for both teacher trainees and students. This must include continual review of the relevance of textbooks as well as replacement of outmoded text books.

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9. All districts must have at least one functional public library with computers, internet connectivity and a professional staff.

10. Voluntary peer educators on Comprehensive Sexuality Education should be part of the counselling units in schools.

11. Teachers who sexually harass students must face the full vigor of the law devoid of any political, institutional or religious barriers.

12. The Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit must be well established in all districts and resourced to carry out its mandate.

13. Family planning is an essential need for all families and must therefore be absorbed by the National Health Insurance Scheme.

Honorable Minister, we look forward to working with you and your team on the above demands.

Signed on behalf of the 217-young people in the NORGHA 2017 conference;

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<td>12th August, 2017</td>
<td>Abubakari Fadila</td>
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<td>Rashida Dauda</td>
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