



Girls Not Brides Participation in the 5th Regional Conference Population on Population and Development in Latin America and The Caribbean



INTRODUCTION

The participation of Girls Not Brides in the 5th Regional Conference Population on Population and Development in Latin America and The Caribbean (RCPD LAC) and in the Social Forum prior to the Conference, held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, on July 3 and 4, 2024, has been a key effort to make visible and address early and forced child marriages and unions (CEFMU) in the region through the declaration of civil society and a parallel event co-organized with ALIADAS. It was also a relevant space for the articulation of member organizations and allies working on the issue.

MONTEVIDEO CONSENSUS AS A KEY INSTRUMENT FOR ADDRESSING CEFMU IN THE REGION

The Montevideo Consensus, signed more than 10 years ago, is the most progressive regional agreement around population and development in terms of human rights, covering sexual and reproductive rights of children, adolescents and youth from a gender, intercultural and intersectional perspective. This agreement is fundamental to address CEFMU in Latin America and the Caribbean, highlighting the active participation of youth in public debate and political decision-making.

Relevant agreement of the 5th RCPD resolution:

(The states) "Reaffirm their commitment to achieving gender equality, through respect, protection and realization of the rights of all women, adolescents and girls, the empowerment, autonomy and independence of all women in the economic, political, social, cultural and family spheres, universal access to health services, as well as the protection of their sexual and reproductive rights, and the elimination of multiple and interrelated forms of discrimination, exclusion, inequality and violence that affect women, adolescents, young people, girls and boys, in the public and private spheres, as an essential requirement to achieve inclusive and sustainable development, in accordance with the general principles of the Montevideo Consensus."

SOCIAL FORUM AND CIVIL SOCIETY'S DECLARATORY

The Cartagena 2024 Social Forum was a space for dialogue between organized civil society and represented largely by the regional Feminist Movement prior to the 5th RCPD. Among its objectives was reflection on the challenges of implementing the Montevideo Consensus, how to move forward as a movement and collectively validate the declaration of civil society that is read during the Conference in front of the participating States.

During the forum the following topics were discussed:

- Main challenges in the region for the implementation of the Montevideo Consensus, where structural inequalities, poverty, impunity, the lack of response from states that dilute their responsibilities towards the Consensus, and the advance of conservative and anti-rights positions stood out.
- The paths to advance intersectionality were discussed, highlighting the importance of recognizing the structural violence experienced more deeply by Afro-descendant populations, indigenous peoples, rural people, and people living with disabilities.
- The most pressing violations of Sexual and Reproductive Rights were reviewed, mainly the advancement of the religious and ultra-conservative agenda and the mismatch between public policies and the needs of girls, adolescents, youth and women.
- In the end, it was discussed how civil society organizations can be strengthened and what the organizational challenges of the movement are, recognizing that not all of the movement is feminist, and that intersectionality, the protection of territory and the guarantee of sexual rights and reproductive ones have to be the agendas that continue to be pushed and monitored in the countries.

GIRLS NOT BRIDES ORAL INTERVENTION

“Us, adolescents and youth, we are not seeing the issue of Child, Early, and Forced Marriages and Unions (CEFMU) positioned with a focus on progressive and non-punitive autonomy. These practices have their roots in social and gender inequality, which is why in Latin America and the Caribbean the indigenous and Afro-descendant populations are the most affected.

Faced with this, approaches must move away from racist stereotypes and consider the intersectionality of inequalities that these communities go through, proposing decolonial measures, with social and racial justice and an intercultural perspective, including communities in the design and implementation of addressing actions and policies.

In contexts of insecurity, educational and economic exclusion and narco-governments, CEFMU are a survival strategy for girls, adolescents and their families. This is an issue that cuts across all agendas and is intersectional and must be addressed from the perspective of youth and with them at the center.”

Read at the Cartagena Social Forum by Luisa Castro, youth delegate and co-director of Girl Up Mexico

REFLECTION OF GIRLS NOT BRIDES MEMBERSHIP DURING THE 5TH CRPD

CRPD: Strategic and Priority Space

At the 5th CRPD, 30 representatives of the Girls Not Brides membership and youth groups from Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and the Dominican Republic reflected on the importance of this space to make child and early marriages and unions visible and forced (MUITF), from a perspective that contemplates its comprehensive approach, considering children and adolescents as subjects of rights, putting their autonomy and well-being at the center.

Strategies for action:

- Use the Montevideo Consensus as a tool to make the CEFMU visible based on its direct relationship with social, economic and gender inequality in the region, as well as the importance of the approach being intersectional and intercultural.
- Position the CEFMU in relation to other agendas, especially with the agenda of sexual and reproductive rights, recognizing the autonomy of girls and adolescents and their rights, primarily differentiating their sexual rights from their reproductive rights according to their evolving capacities.
- Monitor government reports to contrast with the reality in the territories.
- Demand concrete data to ensure the effectiveness of regional actions to address CEFMU.
- Follow up and monitor the application of government commitments in the territories.

Role of the GNB LAC Secretariat

The path to ensuring that CEFMU is mentioned in the declaration of Civil Society and in the Montevideo Consensus has been long and is a great achievement that must be recognized. However, the fact that it is reflected does not necessarily mean that it is something that is considered in public policy or in comprehensive approaches.

Although the organization of parallel events that make visible the different experiences of girls, youth and adolescence has been relevant; keeping the topic present is not sustained only by these events. For this reason, two routes are proposed:

- **Articulation with Networks:** Collaborate with established networks that contribute to the organization and official documents of the CRPD.
- **Comprehensive Participation:** Be part of the process from planning until it lands on joint and articulated incidence. There is great potential to be able to land and continue incorporating the topic into the entire process.

Actions from membership

- Actively participate in events to make the CEFMU visible under a common narrative.
- Propose concrete actions, based on their experiences, to apply concepts such as interculturality and intersectionality in addressing CEFMU.

ROLE OF YOUTH

Main challenge:

- Regressive Narrative: The narrative around youth has regressed, seeing them as subjects of protection only instead of subjects of rights and political subjects.

Proposals:

- Spaces for Interlocution: Girls Not Brides must lead the creation of spaces so that the voices of youth are relevant and heard. In addition to providing content to the narrative of youth, adolescence and childhood from a perspective of progressive autonomy.
- Participation in the RCPD: It is crucial for youth to understand and get involved in the dynamics and themes of the Conference, that there are materials and narratives according to their needs and language. Continue to question what accessibility really looks like for youth and adolescents in this space.

Recommendations to Improve Youth Participation:

“As adolescents it is important to be in these spaces because we can raise our voices, because it is us, young people, girls and adolescents who live day by day what is happening in each country in which we live.”

- Resources and Conditions: Ensure resources and conditions necessary for the participation of youth and adolescents.
- Equity in Participation: Guarantee equitable participation between youth and adults, and validate the experiences of youth and adolescents.
- Expand Participation: Include more youth and adolescents (not just the same ones) in these spaces, sharing information and opportunities.
- Message Construction: Get involved in the construction of messages in the Social Forum and Youth Forum.
- Communication Tools: Use clear and appropriate tools for youth, adolescence and childhood.
- Leading Participation: Promote active and leading roles for youth in official delegations and key moments.