

Vithyas Rede

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“I’m honored to address you today as a Youth Delegate from Plan International. I am a second-generation Tamil immigrant whose parents were forced to flee their home country Sri Lanka because of the atrocious decades long civil war. Like so many people who have to flee because of genocides, armed conflicts or crimes against humanity, my parents sacrificed everything – leaving behind their home, their community and the life they once knew – all to give me and my siblings a safe future. Growing up in Germany as a female Person of Color, the reality of being dismissed has accompanied me my whole life. The intersectional discrimination I constantly face, fuels my passion to speak up for those who don’t have the privilege to advocate for themselves.

30 years after the Beijing Declaration, it’s devastating to witness the pushback on already established human rights. Hard-won freedoms are being rolled back, femicide as a global crisis remains absent from the Political Declaration and member states fail to implement stronger protections against gender-based violence. **How can we talk about equality while women and girls are being murdered simply for being female?**

At the heart of this crisis is the denial of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. The right to make decisions over our own bodies is not separate from the fight against gender-based violence – it is deeply intertwined. When girls and young women lack access to comprehensive healthcare and safe abortions, they are left vulnerable to cycles of violence and control. **Without SRHR, there is no true freedom – only survival under oppression.**

The reality is even worse for gender-diverse people, female People of Color and other marginalized groups because they face an intersectional dimension of violent discrimination. Especially gender-diverse people are often excluded from legal protections, denied healthcare and subjected to brutal violence simply for existing outside of rigid gender norms. Their fight for safety and recognition is an integral part of the fight for gender justice. **You failed them in this year’s Political Declaration.**

Meaningful youth participation is essential to dismantling the oppressive systems that perpetuate gender inequality. We are the ones who are vigilant about leading movements, taking the risks that you refuse to. Still our perspectives are systematically ignored. Yet, without institutional support, our impact is limited. This exclusion is not only unjust – it’s strategic incompetence. We need governments and international organizations to actively include us.

The fight for gender justice must be intersectional and global. **If we fail to stop the push back, we will fail the generations to come. Young people are not just the future – we’re here, we’re ready and we refuse to be silenced.** Thank you.“