

# Religion, Women's Health and Rights:

## Points of Contention and Paths of Opportunities



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TECHNICAL REPORT

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Points of Contention and  
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United Nations Population Fund



# List of Abbreviations

<b>CAT</b>	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>FBO/FIO</b>	Faith-based (or faith-inspired) organization
<b>FGM</b>	Female genital mutilation
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>HR</b>	Human rights
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ICESCR</b>	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development (1994, Cairo)
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>OIC</b>	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
<b>POA</b>	Programme of Action (outcome of 1994 Cairo Conference)
<b>RLs</b>	Religious leaders
<b>RR</b>	Reproductive rights
<b>SRH</b>	Sexual and reproductive health
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UDHR</b>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNGA</b>	United Nations General Assembly
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VAW</b>	Violence against Women
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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# Foreword

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 are fundamental to the United Nations mandate and that of UNFPA. Their foundation is the human dignity that is at the heart of human rights. The goals shine a spotlight on women and girls, reflecting the conviction, bolstered by solid evidence, that progress towards gender equality is central to sustainable development. They affirm the principles of equality embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights signed in 1948. The proposed goal of universal health care and the target for sexual and reproductive health-care services are integral to this vision of equality and thus to the SDGs' ethos and framework.

Remarkable progress has been made towards the vision and on some of the specific targets set forth in the year 2000 in the Millennium Declaration, for example on girls' education and child survival. However, we must acknowledge pending shortcomings, notably in the targets set for better maternal health and in improving the welfare of young women. In the discussions about the post-2015 agenda, this balance sheet led to a sharpened focus on the broad topic of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

In the lead-up to the September 2015 General Assembly meeting and in related contexts such as the Women's Major Group, we witnessed different views around the translation of principles into action in the area of sexual and reproductive health. While there is a widespread perception that many of those differences are linked to cultural and religious beliefs and practices, the reality is far more complex. Indeed the topic of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights involves special sensitivities. Various approaches are sharply contested. However, there is important common ground that affirms human rights and calls us to listen to and respect the different perspectives that are a fundamental gift of diverse human communities.

This paper seeks to inform Member States, civil society organizations, including Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) and the UN, among others, about the context and the nature of debates and different perspectives related to some particularly sensitive issues around sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Its aim is indeed the sustainability of efforts and the achievement of common ground among different actors to move forward gender equality and women's human rights.



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