



LET'S GET TALKING ABOUT THE WORLD YWCA AND ICW'S
FIFTH KEY CHALLENGE
AT THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S SUMMIT, KENYA 2007



The World YWCA and ICW say
Let's Talk About: 'Human rights and Sexuality'

We will hear these words many times in Nairobi. HIV positive women challenge us to think deeply about them.

- *I dream of HIV positive women in Swaziland having the liberty to choose whether or not to conceive. Of having the freedom to engage in sexual relationships if we want to, without fear or criticism from others. (ICW member, Swaziland)*

All over the world women struggle to achieve their human rights. Sexual rights are even more inaccessible. There are no international policy instruments that define and enshrine sexual rights. They are only achievable through respect of our full human rights.

It is usual when talking about HIV positive women's rights to link reproductive and sexual health and rights. However, in our experience, issues around sexual health, our pleasure, safety, and sexual danger get lost in the discussion.

Why is this? Perhaps because we all find it more difficult to be open about our sexual lives and desires than about reproduction. Perhaps because some people still believe that HIV positive women should not be having sex at all. And perhaps because there are powerful forces in the world that disapprove of women taking control of their sexual lives.

For us, HIV makes discussions about sex, our bodies, and our desires for freedom from male and family violence more complicated.

- *Men are supposed to be strong and heterosexual like the Russian male stereotype. Even during sex with a woman, it's impossible for a Lithuanian man to go down on her. It's more in and out and in and out and 'Phew!' (ICW member living in Lithuania)*
- *Abstinence and prevention messages have removed love from the whole thing. (ICW member, Namibia)*
- *We know very little about what goes on in HIV positive women's vaginas. (Researcher)*

We want policy makers, health professionals, government bodies, and grass roots organisations to take on the many different meanings of our lives. We want the International Women's Summit on HIV and AIDS to make a genuine and deep attempt to listen to us, learn from us, work with us. Let's get talking.

- *We are asking for choices: the ability to choose to be abstinent if we want, or faithful if we want, the ability to choose to use condoms. We don't have those choices now and that's the problem. (ICW member, Zimbabwe)*

Talking points:

1. Do we welcome sexual diversity into our networks? Are we open to women who are not heterosexual, not monogamous and have sex outside of marriage, for example?
2. How do young HIV positive women feel about sexuality and sexual practice?
3. How do love, responsibility, respect, and relationships connect with sex, desire and sexual health?
4. What does sexual health mean for young HIV positive women?

ICW and World YWCA Challenge: Are young HIV positive women being included at every level in all discussions and planning around human rights, including sexual rights?

**The World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA) and
International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS (ICW)**

To find out more visit our websites: www.icw.org and <http://www.worldywca.info>

