

Bangkok Declaration 2016 on Women's Health and Eliminating Unsafe Abortion

**Bangkok, Thailand
On 29th January 2016**

We need to know the past to understand the present and to shape the future.

We participants, from a wide range of health professionals of more than 52 nations across the globe at the Third IWAC 2016, declare the following:

Status quo – a divided world for women's health and survival

As a consequence of the illegal status of abortion, women are suffering and even dying on a daily basis in Thailand and most other countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. However, the laws criminalizing abortion in all these countries are not indigenous laws, but were introduced by former European colonial powers and have been in force ever since. Even countries that were never colonized like Thailand copied the legal system of the powers of that time.

The high rate of women's suffering and even dying as a consequence of illegal abortion was also a tragic daily event in the former colonial powers when they introduced their law to the rest of the world. However, half a century ago, Western societies were no longer willing to accept the negative consequences for the health and survival of half their population, so they legalized abortion. This led to a dramatic improvement: the horrors of past times disappeared virtually overnight and women stopped dying from unsafe abortion. Because of legal and easy access to abortion, these countries have not only become a safe haven for women, but have also experienced unprecedented economic and social development. When women are empowered, nations prosper.

The way forward

The experience from the past and present clearly shows that "women are not dying of diseases we can't treat. They are dying because societies have yet to make the decision that their health and lives are worth saving."* The one lesson we can learn from the past is that there is no sensible alternative to giving women and men the right and freedom to decide over the most intimate aspects of life: their sexuality and fertility. This includes unrestricted and legal access to contraception and abortion.

The participants of the congress on Women's Health therefore call on:

- **The government of Thailand and other countries where abortion is still restricted or illegal** to decriminalize abortion to make their countries safe for women, and to enable 50% of their population to contribute to their families and to society.
- **The governments of Western countries** to share their highly positive experiences as a result of legalizing or decriminalizing abortion, and to engage collaboratively with other countries to repeal archaic abortion laws, which they had originally introduced.

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* citation Prof. Mahmoud Fathalla, former President of FIGO