



United Nations General Assembly

Special Session

Commemoration of the 20th

anniversary of the International

Conference on Population and

Development in Cairo

Speech by Pascale Boistard
State Secretary for Women's Rights
22 September 2014 at 17:30

President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, 220 million women do not have access to contraception. 20 million voluntary terminations of pregnancy are performed in unsafe conditions every year, and they cause the deaths of 50,000 women who often leave many orphaned children behind. 8 million of them are affected by complications, terrible ailments caused by these non-medicalized procedures. What a lot of suffering for these thousands of women who pay a very high price for the freedom to control their own bodies!

This is an additional form of violence that they face, especially women in the poorest social categories.

Over two hundred years ago, one day in September 1791, a woman in France, Olympe de Gouges, wrote the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen*.

In thinking about the suffering of women who gave birth to children out of wedlock, she demanded for them the recognition of their fathers, “*without being forced by a barbarous prejudice to conceal the truth.*”

Also, with a view to the post-2015 development agenda, I believe in clarification around shared definitions of concepts such as sexual and reproductive rights. This is what the Beijing conference of 1995 wanted to establish.

That conference, which came a few months

after the Cairo conference, proclaimed that women's fundamental rights include the right to control their sexuality and their motherhood without being subject to restrictions or violence, with the freedom to take decisions. It is on this basis that France commits itself to seeing these rights, which have been proclaimed at international level, **translated into national legislation.**

In order to have control over their life choices, women need to be educated and informed. For them to be able to make informed decisions, they need to know about different methods of contraception and be able to access them without difficulty.

For this reason, for the post-2015 development agenda, France proposes universal access to sexual and reproductive health rights, and it supports all efforts concerning education, especially education for girls as well as boys.

In a context characterized by the return of conservative and obscurantist ideas, the road is long and the time when this *habeas corpus* will be established for women is still a long way off.

France wants to continue to commit itself within the United Nations to real equality which will finally enable women to control their own destiny.

If we succeed, we will have moved, together, our societies towards the goal of a sustainable civilization in which justice and freedom prevail.

Thank you for listening.