

Nabila Nasir, on behalf of ARROW and 16 organizations under the Youth Leadership Working Group

Thank you Your Excellency and all distinguished delegates here today for giving me this opportunity to speak at this platform. My name is Nabila Nasir from Malaysia and I am speaking on behalf of Asia Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, and 16 other organizations under the Youth Leadership Working Group.

When I was first selected as a speaker, I thought long and hard about what I would like to convey so that as a young person living in a continent where people under 30 is the largest population in the world – I could be the mouthpiece for them. I could ask that the youth community in all of its spectrum be included in participatory and gender budgeting as well as capacity building in the policymaking cycle, in fostering global partnerships and in the process of warranting technology transfer and application.

But in the end, I decided on sharing a very personal and deeply delicate story with all of you today. One that I have not shared with many, but is pertinent to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people.

Ever since the age of 4, I have carried with me a haunting memory. It happened during one of the trips my mother took me back to her village to visit my grandparents. I was riding pillion on my grandfather's motorcycle, between him and my grandmother. They dressed me in traditional clothes, similar to the one I am wearing now, and we rode that bike on a long and dusty road to reach a hut with cold cement floors and lots of other girls waiting in line. Being 4 years old, I did not understand what was being done to me. Even as I returned to urban settings, my young mind then tried to comprehend why it was painful, weeks following that experience.

At the age of 21 I discovered that what I went through was FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING, and that this is a harmful traditional practice. When I confronted my mother, she said that it was necessary to make me a good wife in the future. Such a statement coming from a woman who lived in London for 8 years and educated to college level was shocking to me. When I shared the experience with some friends, they said they are not sure if it had happened to them, and if it did, it didn't matter. But it mattered to me. I wanted to know the why, the how and the when.

Several years later, I travelled to a village with a producer and a cameraman in an effort to film a documentary on the issue, and we found a traditional birth attendant to interview. As the camera rolled, I asked this elderly woman about the process of female genital cutting and she said that she usually does it to girls from as young as 6 months old to about 5 years of age. She said that the older the child is, the harder her work would be, to coax the child to participate in the procedure.

And then I asked her if she could kindly show me the tools she used for this procedure. Naively, I expected to see a set of surgical knives in a case. But instead, she took out a pair

of OLD, RUSTY SCISSORS from her handbag. “Here it is!” she said proudly. The cameraman almost dropped the equipment he was holding.

The documentary was not completed and shown in the end, due to lack of funding and other extenuating political circumstances that remains a barrier to sexual and reproductive health and rights. And today, I can only verbally share with you an excerpt of that journey.

This story, unfortunately, is just one of millions to affect the lives of young people today.

I am asking you to please remember this story as we negotiate here on issues of financing, technology facilitation and capacity building, that it is vital to fully integrate the lived realities of millions of young people, their access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, and their right to live without discrimination and violence.

Please ensure that this story do not get slipped between the cracks of development issues.

Thank you.