



March 8th, 2018

Dear Director-General, dear Dr. Tedros,

We would like to commend the World Health Organization for its leadership on global health issues. And we would like to commend you personally for your reform agenda working to ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all, at all ages in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. WHO has a strong advocacy role to play as the evidence based normative and standard-setting global organization providing guidance based on data, research and innovation in achieving the highest standard of health as a fundamental right of every human being.

We, therefore, have noted with great interest the recent study conducted by your Department for Reproductive Health and Research on virginity testing. The study is presented as the first systematic review of available evidence on the medical utility of virginity testing by hymen examination and its potential impacts on the examinee. The study concludes that hymen examination does not accurately or reliably predict virginity status and could cause physical, psychological and social harms to the examinee. The report points out that a forced virginity exam may result in severe negative effects such as anxiety, depression, isolation from society, a dysfunctional sex life, guilt, worsened self-respect, and fear of death. From a rights perspective, it is a form of gender discrimination and a violation of fundamental rights.

A recent book in Denmark by Jørgen Lange Thomsen and Gry Stevens Senderovitz correlates with the findings of the WHO study, and we share the view, that health professionals, public officials and community leaders must be better informed. Medical and other textbooks and sexual education material must be updated to reflect current knowledge based on facts. Attention to these facts must be communicated to girls and boys as well as their parents.

The revised WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNWOMEN, UNAIDS common International technical guidance on sexuality education, is an important step towards a comprehensive evidence-

informed approach to promoting sexuality, human rights and gender equality, and we fully support the guidelines. Eliminating the myth of virginity testing should be emphasized in this respect.

We would like to encourage WHO to further promote this issue and would be interested to learn of any planned initiative to strengthen the message of banning virginity testing in future communications, statements, events or as part of the Human Reproduction Programme in order for countries to review their policies and move towards such a banning.

Since the inspection of the hymen cannot give conclusive evidence of sexual activity, we have a shared responsibility to end this myth.

We remain fully committed to gender equality and the promotion of women's and girls' rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is about their right to decide freely and without coercion on their sexual and reproductive health issues.

Sincerely,



Karen Ellemann



Ulla Tørnæs



Ellen Trane Nørby