



Webinar on Teenage Pregnancy organized by Roots of Health and Spark! Philippines

26 October 2021

Opening Remarks by Ambassador Annika Thunborg

Protecting girls' autonomy and promoting SRHR

- Good afternoon everyone. It is my pleasure to be with you this afternoon. Many thanks to SPARK! and Roots of Health, my dear colleagues from the Netherlands and Switzerland, ChildFund Philippines, and Twitter for the invitation and for co-organizing this event in commemoration of Girl's month.
- As we all know, teen pregnancy has been a rising concern; in the Philippines, it is even currently heralded as a "national emergency." More so during the COVID-19 pandemic, during which there has been an increase in unplanned pregnancies – one of the "gendered effects of lockdown" as we say.
- Sweden has a feminist foreign policy. Its goal is to seek parity, and to see to it that girls can enjoy the same rights, resources, and representation as do boys.
- This includes empowering and enabling the girls to freely shape their lives and have full bodily autonomy.
- Girls cannot do that if they are busy being mothers.
- For women and girls to realize their full potential and full participation in society, girls must have access to comprehensive and science-based sex education, access to contraception, and be able to discuss and ask questions about sex -- without judgement or discrimination. This enables them to make decisions if they want children, and if so, when, and how many.
- Providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights to young people promotes safer sex, reduces unwanted pregnancies, and lowers school drop-out rates. This enables them to participate in civil society, economic growth, and sustainable development.
- On the other hand, gaps in sexual and reproductive health and rights and access to health services worldwide put women's lives at risk and hamper gender equality. Around 800 women die in childbirth each day, 20 million women each year suffer from some form of disability due to pregnancy- and childbirth-related complications, and 215 million women are left with unmet needs for contraception.
- In 2017, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and my country Sweden, launched the SheDecides initiative as a movement to increase political

Postal Address:
1634 Taguig

Tel. no.:
+63 2 811 7900

Email:
ambassaden.manila@gov.se

Address:
11/F DelRosarioLaw Centre
21st Drive corner 20th Drive
Bonifacio Global City, Taguig

Fax no.: +63 2 811 7940

commitment, resources, and financial support to sexual and reproductive health and rights worldwide.

- The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, SIDA, also works to increase young people's knowledge of sexuality education and adolescent health, as well as pushing for accessible contraceptives. This work is often conducted jointly with the UN and its agencies, which are the greatest experts in the field.
- I look forward to the discussion here today and rest assure that Sweden is committed to continue to work for women's and girls' full access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Thank you.

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