



Policy Brief

Sexual Rights Defined

“Sexual rights” is a controversial, elastic term that is used to promote a number of controversial rights relating to human sexuality. It is the Trojan horse of the sexual rights movement. Fortunately, every time “sexual rights” in any grammatical formulation (e.g., “sexual and reproductive rights,” “sexual and reproductive health and rights,” etc.) has been proposed by liberal countries during negotiations, it has been rejected—for good reason. There is no international consensus on the definition of the term. When a definition is called for by a Member State during negotiations, the only response is that there isn’t a definition.

While the term “reproductive rights” garnered an explanation in ICPD,¹ there is no such explanation or definition for “sexual rights,” which is why the use of this term in official UN documents is so dangerous.

A disturbing trend occurring with increasing frequency within the United Nations system is the appearance of the term “sexual rights”² in UN publications that have not been negotiated by UN Member States. Since sexual rights advocates know they cannot get the term “sexual rights” adopted in documents and resolutions that are negotiated transparently by UN Member States, they seek to get UN agencies and experts to include “sexual rights” in reports they publish instead. Then they try to convince UN Member States to endorse reports in UN resolutions, without Member States fully realizing or understanding the controversial elements they contain.

Although UN Member States have not arrived at consensus with regard to the definition of “sexual rights,” some UN agencies, including UNFPA and WHO, and some ECOSOC-accredited NGOs have developed their own definition of “sexual rights.” These definitions provide a glimpse of the potential damage that would result to societies, families, and individuals—especially children—throughout the world if the term is allowed in documents directly, and even if the term is allowed indirectly, through references to outside documents in which the term appears.

Based on information provided by these UN agencies and NGOs, it is clear that the concept of “sexual rights” likely could encompass all of the following and more:

¹ “. . . reproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. This includes the right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in human rights documents.” ICPD 7.3

² There are multiple grammatical formulations that are used to connect the word “sexual” to the word “rights” in the language that appears in proposed UN documents.

contraception, abortion, gender identity (certification of birth, identity papers), gender expression (transgenderism, hormone therapy, sex reassignment surgery), pornography (production and use), sexual relations, age of consent, sexual orientation, sodomy, employment, housing, adultery, prostitution (sex work), use of public facilities, civil unions/domestic partnerships, same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, polygamy, fertility services, and sexuality education.

In January 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO) developed a “working definition” of “sexual rights” and other controversial, undefined terms by holding consultations with international experts. According to WHO, these working definitions “reflect an evolving understanding of the concepts and build on international consensus documents such as the ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action. These working definitions are offered as a contribution to advancing understanding in the field of sexual health.” And then ironically, WHO adds, “. . . [these working definitions] do not represent an official position of WHO.”³

The definition of “sexual rights” determined by WHO’s technical experts “include the right of all persons [no mention of any age here, so these “sexual rights” would pertain to children], free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to:

- the highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services; (“Reproductive health care services” is commonly interpreted by UN treaty bodies to include abortion.)
- seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality; (“Information” could consist of nearly anything—including comprehensive sexuality education and pornographic material.)
- sexuality education; (Comprehensive sexuality education programs promoted and funded by UN agencies typically contain highly controversial material that includes instruction on masturbation and dangerous, high-risk sexual behaviors.)
- choose their partner; (This would certainly include a right to engage in homosexual behavior.)
- consensual sexual relations; (This would include a right to prostitution and could be interpreted to include adult/child sexual relations if they are considered “consensual.”)
- consensual marriage; (This would include a right to same-sex marriage or polygamous marriage.)

³ Defining sexual health: Report of a technical consultation on sexual health, 28–31 January 2002, Geneva, p. 5. Available: http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual_health/defining_sexual_health.pdf

- decide whether or not, and when, to have children; (This opens the door to legalized abortion.)
- pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.” (Again, this right would pertain to “all persons” of any age, including children.)

Quite disturbing, are the definitions and explanations of “sexual rights” by UNFPA and ECOSOC-accredited NGOs such as International Planned Parenthood (IPPF), which is funded by numerous governments and UN agencies⁴ and works closely with Western UN Member States that aggressively promote sexual rights.

The following documents aggressively promote radical sexual rights and have either been published by UN agencies or cited to in UN agency publications.

“Born Free and Equal”

This booklet is published by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and claims to be for the purpose of ending violence against LGBT individuals. Violence, torture, or inhuman treatment of any person for any reason should not be tolerated. But the OHCHR booklet is intended not just to stop violence against LGBT people; rather, it seeks to single out LGBT people for special protections and grant them controversial “rights” unrelated to violence. It falsely claims that international human rights law requires UN Member States to mainstream acceptance of LGBT behavior in every aspect of society, allegedly to prevent “discrimination.” The booklet presents a grave threat to national sovereignty, parental rights, cultural and moral values, religious liberty, and public health and safety of UN Member States.

“Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration”

This is the outcome document of the Bali Global Youth Forum convened by the United Nations for Member States, youth groups, individual youth participants, non-governmental organizations, private sector institutions and other stakeholders, and thousands of virtual participants. This document demands that governments recognize that “young people have autonomy over their own bodies, pleasures, and desires,” and calls for governments to support the sexual rights of all youth regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It calls on governments to provide comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraception, and the legalization of abortion (without parental consent), prostitution, same-sex marriage, and homosexual behavior. The document references the WHO working definition of sexual rights, the Yogyakarta Principles, and Sexual Rights: an IPPF Declaration. (See below for quotes from this publication.)

⁴ In 2010, IPPF received over \$80 million from numerous governments and tens of millions of dollars from many other organizations including UNAIDS, UNFPA, UN Women, The World Bank, and WHO. IPPF’s 2010 financial statement is available [here](#).

“International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights”

This document, which was not negotiated by Member States, was sponsored by the joint United Nations program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It calls for mandatory sex education for children without regard to religious and cultural values, the right for men to have sex with men, penalties for the “vilification of people who engage in same-sex relationships, the legalization of prostitution, same-sex marriage, and abortion on demand.

“Technical guidance on the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of policies and programmes to reduce preventable maternal morbidity and mortality”

This report released by the High Commissioner for Human Rights is for the alleged purpose of improving women’s health and reduce maternal mortality and morbidity, but it has little to do with maternal mortality and morbidity, and instead, is a thinly veiled attempt to establish highly controversial sexual rights as international human rights. The Commissioner attempts to do this, in part, by repeating in the text the phrase “sexual and reproductive health rights” 29 times, even though this controversial phrase has been rejected by UN Member States every time it has been proposed in UN negotiations. The phrase “sexual and reproductive health rights,” appears nowhere in any UN consensus document.

“International Guidelines on Sexuality Education”

This document, published by UNESCO, though having undergone several revisions, is still available and defines “comprehensive sexuality education.” It promotes highly controversial concepts to children including teaching among other things, that 1) masturbation is healthy and normal; 2) abortion is safe; 3) different sexual orientations and gender identities should be respected; and 4) sexual behaviors can be pleasurable and are without risk of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Below are excerpts from various publications that reveal how the term “sexual rights” can and will be interpreted to promote controversial sexual ideologies and sexual behaviors as human rights (emphasis added):

Promoting Broad, Vague and Elastic Definitions that Can Include Almost Anything

- “*Sexual rights* . . . are an evolving set of *entitlements related to sexuality* that contribute to the freedom, equality and dignity of all people. . .” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. i)
- “As with other *human rights*, states have obligations on three levels: to *respect, protect and fulfil* [sic] *the sexual rights of all*. . .” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. vi)
- “All persons have the right to be recognized before the law and to *sexual freedom*, . . . to choose their sexual partners, to seek to experience their *full sexual potential and pleasure*, within a framework of non discrimination and with due regard to the rights of

others and to *the evolving capacity of children.*” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. vii)

- “All persons have the right to effective, adequate, accessible and appropriate educative, legislative, judicial and other measures to ensure and demand that those who are *duty-bound to uphold sexual rights* are fully accountable to them.” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. vii)

Promoting Homosexual, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Rights

- *Comprehensive sexuality education* should be developed in partnership with young people and *include information on sexual orientation and gender identities that is free of religious intolerance.* (Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration, p. 11)
- “IPPF understands that a framework of non-discrimination underlines all human rights protection and promotion. This framework of non-discrimination prohibits any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of sex, age, gender, *gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, sexual history or behaviour*, real or imputed . . .” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 13)
- “*Sexual rights protect particular identities . . .and protect all people’s right to be allowed to fulfil and express their sexuality . . .*” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 16)
- “*No person shall be subjected to laws that arbitrarily criminalize consensual sexual relations or practices nor be subjected to arrest or detention on the basis of sex, sexuality or gender, or consensual sexual practices or conduct.*” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 18)
- “No person shall be denied *identity papers* which indicate his/her gender or sex as *reflecting the person’s self defined gender identity*, including but not limited to birth certificates, passports and electoral records.” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 18)

Violating Religious and Cultural Values

- Cultural and religious barriers such as *parental and spousal consent should never prevent access to safe and legal abortion*, and other reproductive health services – recognizing that *young people have autonomy over their own bodies, pleasures, and desires.* (Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration, p. 10)
- “All persons have the right to exercise freedom of thought, opinion and expression regarding ideas on *sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual rights, without arbitrary intrusions or limitations based on dominant cultural beliefs* or political ideology, or discriminatory notions of public order, public morality, public health or public security. . .” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. vii)
- “All persons have the *right to be free from the restrictive interpretation of religious texts, beliefs, philosophies and customs* as tools to curtail freedom of thought on sexual and

reproductive health care and other issues.” (IPPF Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, p. 13)

Promoting a Right to Controversial Sexuality Education and Information for Children and Adults Alike

- “Despite evidence of the effectiveness of [sexuality education] programmes, many young people lack access to the comprehensive sexuality and HIV education that could give them the knowledge, information and tools they need to protect themselves and exercise their reproductive *and sexual rights*.” (“Sexual and Reproductive Health for All” published by UNFPA, p. 40)
- “All persons, without discrimination, *have the right* to education and information generally and to *comprehensive sexuality education* . . .” (IPPF Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, p. 20)
- “All persons [this includes children] have the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas with regards to human rights, *sexual rights, sexual orientation, gender identity and sexuality* through any legal medium. . .” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 19)
- “All persons [this includes children] shall, without regard to national borders, have access to non-traditional and traditional information in all mediums that enhances sexuality, *sexual rights* and sexual health; young people in particular *shall have access to information on sexually and gender non-conforming lives and sexual relations*.” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 20)
- “No person shall be discriminated against in their access to information, health care, or services related to their sexual and reproductive health, rights and needs, throughout their life-span, on the grounds of gender, age, *sexual orientation* or mental or physical disability.” (IPPF Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, p. 11)
- “Childhood sexuality is expressed through genital awareness and exploration. This involves self-touching, caressing parts of the body, including the sexual organs. These are learning experiences that help the individual understand his or her body and incorporate sexuality as an integral part of his or her personality. *Masturbation is a viable mode of satisfaction for many individuals, young and old, and should be fully accepted*.” (“Sexual Rights - A New Bill of Sexual Rights and Responsibilities” by the American Humanist Association)

Promoting Abortion

- *Cultural and religious barriers such as parental and spousal consent should never prevent access to safe and legal abortion*, and other reproductive health services – recognizing that young people have autonomy over their own bodies, pleasures, and desires. (Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration, p. 10)
- “No woman’s life or health shall be put at risk as a consequence of medical treatment being denied to her for any physical or mental condition, or based on others placing a

competing value on the foetus she may be carrying.” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 17)

- “*No woman shall be condemned to forced maternity as a result of having exercised her sexuality.*” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 17)

Sexual Pleasure or a Right to Promiscuity

- “Some, especially those from Latin America and the Caribbean, argued that sexual and reproductive health and rights themes are now passing from the private (family) and religious sphere, into the public arena. *In El Salvador, where conservative opposition to sexual rights is fierce, the strategy had been to focus on human rights, especially the right to non-discrimination, as even the most adamant opposition finds it difficult to defend discrimination.*” (“Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Advancing Human Rights, Gender Equality and Improved Sexual and Reproductive Health” published by UNFPA, p. 49⁵)
- “*Sexual rights guarantee that everyone has access to the conditions that allow fulfillment and expression of their sexualities. . .*” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. vii)
- “[*Sexuality*] is an evolving concept that encompasses sexual activity, gender identities, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, and relationships.” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 11)
- “All persons [this includes children] are entitled to the conditions that enable the *pursuit of a pleasurable sexuality. . .* Given that pleasure is an intrinsic aspect of sexuality, the right to seek, express and determine when to experience it must not be denied to anyone.” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 14)
- “All persons have the *right to be free from externally imposed fear, shame, guilt, beliefs based on myths, and other psychological factors inhibiting their sexual response or impairing their sexual relationships.*” (IPPF Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, p. 9)
- “*Extramarital sexual relationships with the consent of one's partner is being accepted by some.* Premarital sexual relationships, already accepted in some parts of the world, will become even more widely so. This will very likely also be true of homosexual and bisexual relationships. The use of genital associations to express feelings of genuine intimacy, rather than as connections for physical pleasure or procreation alone, may then transcend barriers of age, race, or gender.” (“Sexual Rights - A New Bill of Sexual Rights and Responsibilities,” by the American Humanist Association)

Promoting Adoption for Homosexual and Lesbian Couples

- “All persons shall have the same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in

⁵ “Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration” and other IPPF materials are listed as resources in this UNFPA publication.

national legislation, within a framework of non-discrimination; in all cases the best interests of the children shall be paramount.” (Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration, p. 21)

Promoting Pornography

- “. . .*taboos that cause people to feel that viewing the genitals is an obscenity or that any verbal or visual expression of the sex act is pornographic undermine objectivity and lead to demands for censorship.*” (“Sexual Rights - A New Bill of Sexual Rights and Responsibilities” by the American Humanist Association)

In conclusion, UN agencies and UN-funded organizations are aggressively promoting broad sexual rights that are harmful to individuals but especially to children. These alleged “rights” intrude into almost every area of family life and undermine the family, the rights of parents, respect for religious and cultural values and compromise the health and innocence of children.

We call upon UN Member States to hold accountable those UN agencies and officials who overstep their mandates by promoting sexual rights for which there is no international consensus and pressuring countries to accept these alleged rights.