

Panel on Menstrual Hygiene Management, Human Rights, and Gender Equality Oral Statement

Thank you Mr. President,

The Universal Rights Group thanks the core group on menstrual hygiene management, human rights and gender equality for convening this important panel to discuss the implementation of States' obligations under international human rights law relevant to menstrual hygiene management, including the right to access safe and affordable water and sanitation, work, education, health, non-discrimination and gender equality. URG recognizes the critical importance of menstrual hygiene management, both as a standalone issue and as a gateway to the realization of human rights and the sustainable development goals. With the World Bank estimating that even before the COVID19 pandemic at least 500 million women and girls were unable to attain menstrual health, we should be alarmed at the prospect of leaving so many behind.

In spite of its importance, menstrual hygiene management is seldom addressed by the UN or, notably, by its human rights pillar. This is perhaps most apparent when looking at recommendations given by the international human rights mechanisms which, since 2006, have made less than 50 references to menstruation or menstrual hygiene in the over 200,000 recommendations they have produced.

This relative failure on behalf of the international human rights community to shine a light on such a crucial human rights issue is compounded when considering the transformative potential of leveraging the international human rights mechanisms to ensure the progressive realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights. A URG study that is currently being finalized in partnership with UNFPA clearly demonstrates the impact that stakeholder advocacy to the mechanisms combined with strategic approaches to implementation can have in promoting awareness of State responsibilities relating to specific SRHR issues, in mainstreaming human rights based approaches throughout the UN development system, in empowering local human rights defenders, and in better educating rights holders.

Considering the grave obstacle to gender equality posed by menstrual hygiene mismanagement and the opportunity for policy improvements through the international human rights machinery, we would like to take this opportunity to ask the esteemed panelists what are the main obstacles to greater takeup by the international human rights system of the crucial human rights issue of menstrual hygiene management?