**Input to General Comment No. 36 on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life**

5 October 2017

Right Here Right Now (RHRN) is a global strategic partnership that is active in ten countries in Africa, Asia and Latin-America, as well as the Caribbean sub region. Our partnership envisions a world where all young people are able to access quality and youth-friendly health services, and are not afraid to openly express who they are and who they love. We believe that young people, everywhere, have the inalienable right to make their own choices, and lead happy and healthy lives. The RHRN consortium consists of Rutgers (lead), Hivos, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, dance4life, ARROW, IPPF Africa Region and LACWHN.

The RHRN Consortium greatly appreciates this opportunity to provide input to this important General Comment on the right to life. We consider this a continuous process and welcome the opportunity to engage with the Human Rights Committee, the Officer of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, State Parties, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), and other civil society organisations.

To bring the text in line with the language as included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as other General Comments pertaining to sexual and reproductive health and rights (i.e. CESCR, GC 22), we recommend the following:

We strongly support that the draft general comment addresses access to abortion (paragraph 9). However, we request that in this paragraph, the Committee calls for States parties to end the criminalization of abortion, to provide comprehensive access to safe abortion services for all women, and to lift barriers to safe abortion services – including legal barriers, socio-cultural barriers, barriers in physical access to services, financial barriers as well as conscientious objection, in order to avert unnecessary morbidity and mortality resulting from unsafe abortion as well as physical and mental pain or suffering inflicted on women who are denied access to safe and legal abortion services.

We also recommend that at the end of paragraph 9, the Committee urges States parties to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and to a wide range of modern contraceptives including emergency contraceptives. Access is important for all, not just men and women, to ensure inclusion of those who do not identify with binary interpretations of ‘men and women’, but also for adolescents, bringing the General comment in line with GC 20 on the rights of the child during adolescence.

In paragraph 30, we recommend the Committee to add stronger references on the need to end discrimination that women, girls, adolescents, and gender nonconforming persons face in accessing health services, including in particular sexual and reproductive health services. Women, girls, adolescents and gender nonconforming persons’ access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and education are often restricted by legal and policy barriers, socio-cultural norms and traditions, religious beliefs and practices that are often rooted in structural inequalities and patriarchal and heteronormative notions. They have limited autonomy and capacity to make healthy sexual and reproductive choices, due to gender and power imbalances and inequalities. As a result, they continue facing discrimination and their right to life and dignity remains threatened. Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and recognising these as human rights and integral to the right to life is pertinent, if Article 6 is to be realised.