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TO THE
UNITED NATIONS

REPUBLIC OF MALTA

Statement by

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at the

29th United Nations General Assembly
Special Session
On the Follow-up to the
Programme of Action of the
International Conference on Population and
Development

United Nations
New York
22 September 2014

Mr President,

Malta welcomes the holding of this special session celebrating the 20th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development and its Programme of Action.

The International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994, and the 20 year Programme of Action adopted therein by the International Community changed the perceptions on how to handle population and development issues.

This conference presented a paradigm shift whereby the international community agreed that population was not just about people, but about making people count. Through the Programme of Action the States made a pledge to improve the lives of individuals by moving away from the focus on numbers and instead putting human rights at the heart of population and development issues.

This approach ensured that realising and protecting human rights would in turn contribute to the improvement of human lives and advance everyone's wellbeing.

Mr. President,

The Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development was not only a milestone for what came afterwards, but also a forward looking document. The principles agreed and topics addressed in the 16 Chapter Programme are still very much relevant today.

The 1994 Conference Declaration and its Programme of Action is a point of reference to other processes and other key documents, such as the Beijing Platform for Action. As a matter of fact the principles highlighted in Cairo were reconfirmed six years later when world leaders endorsed the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, which have been a central part of the UN's work over the past 14 years.

Indeed, we can see in current parallel processes discussing the Post 2015 Agenda, that the very same debates our predecessors had 20 years ago are still taking place. We believe that similarly to the interrelationship between the ICPD and the Millennium Development Goals the Post -2015 agenda should move forward the aspirations of the ICPD and its relevant documents whilst addressing gaps identified during the reviews.

With less than a year left it is important that the UN Member States continue their endeavours to fulfil the MDGs. The ensuing process will build upon their successes and seek to address their gaps. Post 2015 framework should accomplish the unfinished business of the MDGs.

Economic and social development continue to be an integral part and the pillars of the Cairo legacy and together with sustainable development remain a dominant factor in today's development agenda. However, ICPD beyond 2014 progress has to be universal, addressing every part of society thus ensuring an all inclusive society, leaving no one behind. It should also support other sectors such as agriculture, energy, transport, environment, health and water.

Furthermore, any development agenda that aims at individual and collective well-being and sustainability has to guarantee dignity and human rights to all individuals. Malta believes that development and human rights are intrinsically interrelated, to this end Malta considers a move towards a human rights-based approach to development cooperation as a positive development. Such an approach helps respect, protect, and fulfill human rights universally.

Mr. President,

The progress in the livelihood of people since the adoption of the Programme of Action can easily be seen. These tangible results include the advancement of the status of women. Most societies now acknowledge and are working towards improving women's full participation in all sectors of society. For example the ICPD helped us promote the importance of economically independent women and their role in decision making particularly political participation as a means of enabling development and healthier societies.

Thanks to the ICPD we have also seen an increase in the rate of education, also as a means of promoting development, gender equality and changing gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes.

In the past 20 years we have seen a decrease in extreme poverty. There have also been significant reductions in maternal deaths and an improvement in skilled birth attendance. Having said that we are still not there yet and more needs to be done.

Mr. President,

The world is passing through difficult and challenging times. The prevalence of poverty, climate change, diseases like malaria and HIV/Aids, the Ebola pandemic, terrorism, natural diseases, the trafficking of persons particularly women and children, and the illegal trafficking of arms and drugs, are all proliferating the risks which our generation is facing even at times threatening the very existence of our populations. Such crises and threats are marginalizing the Cairo Programme of Action and the MDGs, making them beyond our reach unless a renewed effort is made by all of us to correct and turn the tide of these predicaments in the protection of our present and future generations.

Mr. President,

We regret that of late the ICPD Programme of Action has been associated and linked solely to reproductive rights. Though Chapters 7 and 8 represent important aspects of the ICPD, one must appreciate and recognise also the other chapters and the Programme of Action in its entirety.

As it did in Cairo fifteen years ago, Malta would like to once again reaffirm its position on reproductive rights and its long-standing position that any recommendation or commitment should not in any way create an obligation on any party to consider abortion as a legitimate form of reproductive health rights, services or commodities.

Malta continues to hold the view that any discussion of rights and services in connection with reproductive health cannot take place outside the framework of one of the most fundamental of human rights – the right to life. Malta strongly believes that the right to life extends to the

unborn child from the moment of conception, and that therefore the use of abortion as a means of resolving health or social problems is a denial of that right.

It is within this framework of human rights – the right to life - that Malta has in these last twenty years held high the Cairo Declaration and the Programme of Action. It is in this spirit and commitment that Malta will continue to implement the ICPD values and objectives.

Mr. President,

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development is a benchmark document which provided a guide on improving the lives and dignity of all people. The Chapters are based on the notion that we have to all strive for the improvement of human lives through the promotion and protection of human rights. The process of how to implement this belief has been the basis of a constant debate since 1994.

As we move forward and the target date for the Millennium Development Goals approaches, the international community needs to renew its commitments and efforts to achieve the goals and commitments of the ICPD. It must also build on the ICPD and work hard to reach a consensus on the post-2015 agenda which responds to the opportunities and challenges of today's world.

We believe that the work of the Beyond 2014 should be grounded in a critical evaluation of the success of the ICPD, MDGs and subsequent relevant commitments, identifying areas which were successful and areas of improvement, and apply them in response to the current development challenges in a Post-2015 framework.

