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STATEMENT
by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
Gennady M. GATILOV
at the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly
on the Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International
Conference on Population and Development

22 September 2014

Mr. President,

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) forms a sound basis for multilateral cooperation on the whole range of population-related issues. Adopted in Cairo in 1994, this instrument remains relevant and highly needed in the context of current demographic processes. We consider the review of the Programme of Action to be a valuable contribution to the inclusion of these problems in the global post-2015 development agenda.

We are confident that the population-related issues should be adequately addressed in the Sustainable Development Goals that are being elaborated. The core task, in our view, is to respond to the basic needs of the population related to the access to healthcare, education, food, water, energy, and employment. We draw on the understanding that the Programme of Action is not subject to revision and will continue to serve as political framework and guidelines for the activities of the United Nations and its Member States.

Regrettably, we have to note that the past regional review conferences have demonstrated the existence of alarming tendencies – certain delegations tend to arbitrarily interpret the languages of the ICPD. We are concerned with the attempts to revise the provisions of the Programme of Action contrary to the decisions of the UN General Assembly. We note with disappointment that the UNFPA Secretariat plays quite an active role here. The Fund's biased and selective approach is regretful. Innovations and concepts which are inconsistent with the ICPD provisions, lack universal support and run counter to public values of entire groups of countries are unacceptable and should remain outside the review process as well as the post-2015 development agenda. I am referring, in particular, to such concepts as "sexual rights", "sexual orientation" and "gender identity".

We are convinced that collective efforts can be efficient only if based on the full integration of economic, cultural and religious specifics, as well as traditions and customs of particular countries and peoples, and the focus on goals and tasks that can unite us.

Mr. President,

In the course of the review, we consider it important to abandon the erroneous conclusion that the reduction of fertility is the only proper way of ensuring economic development and social well-being. We cannot fail to note the bias of this approach which does not take into account all the aspects of the demographic transition concept as well as the diversity of demographic situations in different countries all over the world.

We should not ignore the issues which are pivotal for the countries where the birth rate is below replacement level including structural changes and population ageing, the decrease in the working-age population and the growth in the share of dependants, the increase of the pressure on pension systems and the systems of social security and health care.

The issues of sexual and reproductive health should be considered in a wider context of health care including the improvement of maternal health, the fight against non-communicable diseases as well as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. In the context of achieving the ICPD goals, we should not neglect the importance of ensuring universal access to education, including primary education, and to vocational training, as well as social protection of population and creating favourable conditions for employment with an emphasis on creating jobs for young people.

Mr. President,

Russia's priority is to overcome the demographic crisis of the 90s caused by negative population growth. The aim of our population policy for the period up to 2025 is to attain a stable population and create conditions which promote its sustained growth and increased life expectancy and birth rate.

In order to achieve the established goals measures which are being undertaken cover all the dimensions of demographic development. The systems of health care, education and social protection are undergoing qualitative changes.

Our strategic task is to support the traditional family as a union between a man and a woman. A set of measures to support the institution of family as a fundamental unit of society envisages ensuring family well-being and social protection including the state support of poor and young families, balancing work and family and promotion of intergenerational cohesion and mutual help.

The public financial support for families with children has been significantly strengthened. Women who have given birth to second and more children are provided with maternity capital, which now, after being indexed, amounts to 12.3 thousand USD. It is supplemented with payments from local financing funds. Multi-child families are provided free of charge with land for building a residential house, discounts on utilities, free travel on urban transport,

free medicines for children and meals for them in schools. Income tax benefits for working parents have been increased.

Measures are adopted to improve the functioning of the obstetrics system and the availability and quality of medical aid during pregnancy. Women, while on maternity leave for up to three years, can undergo free professional training or retraining in occupations in demand. Measures are taken to promote flexible and distance employment for women with children. The system of care services for children of preschool age is progressing.

We have embarked on the creation of 25 million highly productive workplaces. Particular attention is paid to supporting vulnerable groups of population, such as people with physical disabilities, including the creation of a barrier-free urban environment and facilitation of employment.

We have adopted special programs to reduce deaths from cardiovascular and cancer diseases and road traffic accidents. A set of measures is being implemented to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Active public demographic policy brings tangible results. The birth rate in recent years has increased from 1.3 to 1.7 children per woman; in absolute terms, the birth rate has risen from 1.4 million to 1.9 million children a year. We have succeeded in increasing life expectancy. As a result, contrary to all forecasts, since 2013 natural population growth excluding migration has been registered in Russia for the first time in 20 years.

Mr. President,

Russia aims at strengthening multilateral cooperation in the field of population and enhancing its effectiveness through consolidation of national attitudes and approaches and streamlining of practical work carried out within the UN. We are ready to do our utmost so that this review gives a powerful impetus to relevant efforts for decades to come.

Thank you.