



**Special session of the UN General Assembly on the
Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the
International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)**

**Statement of
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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for his opening remarks and for giving me the opportunity to address you on this special occasion. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his unwavering support for the ICPD Programme of Action and the ICPD Beyond 2014 review and for his reports on the review.

Many have contributed to bringing us to this auspicious moment and I would like to thank your Governments, Excellencies, for your commitment and support and the progress made in your countries to improve people's lives.

As in Cairo, civil society was critical to the success of the ICPD review and I want to express our gratitude for their dedication and support.

Mr. President,

In 1992, the world rallied around the concept of sustainable development at the Earth Summit in Rio. Central to this new concept was the principle that "human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development."

In Cairo just two years later, the ICPD Programme of Action defined this principle in real terms and forever changed how we perceive population and development. It shifted the focus from human numbers to human lives, human well-being and human rights. Cairo ensured that a bedrock principle of development would be to realize dignity and human rights for all people as a means of achieving our collective goals.

Over the past 20 years, we have seen the rise of hundreds of millions out of poverty, gender parity in primary education, fewer women dying giving life and more women in the workforce. These advances show just how powerful development founded on dignity and human rights can be.

But we still have a long way to go.

Our world is growing increasingly unequal, and all too often women and girls get the short end of the stick.

The pace of climate change and environmental degradation shows that we cannot sustain a system in which those at the top continue to draw more and more of our finite resources. Until we can deliver for all people equitably, and enable all people to reach their potential, we cannot achieve sustainable development.

Excellencies,

The right to health is incontrovertible and this Assembly has adopted numerous resolutions on the importance of ensuring the highest attainable standard of health for all. Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are universal human rights. They are also central to sustainability, gender equality and the empowerment of women.

But for many, the right to sexual and reproductive health is still not a reality.

Not for the 10-year-old child bride forced to marry an older man and bear his children before her mind and body are ready...

Not for the adolescent girl who, lacking the information and services to prevent an unwanted pregnancy, resorts to unsafe abortion...

Not for the poor rural woman facing a difficult birth without a skilled attendant and far from the nearest health clinic...

Not for tens of thousands of young people who lack the means and the knowledge to protect themselves from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections...

Not for those affected by crises and conflicts, which often put women and girls at risk of sexual violence and limit their access to safe spaces, services and support.

And the consequence can be a death sentence: 800 women die every day from pregnancy related causes, many of them adolescent girls. And for every maternal death, 20 more women and girls endure preventable complications, including obstetric fistula.

Whether a woman is rich or poor should not determine whether she lives or dies.

To achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and ensure reproductive rights for all, we must bolster fragile health systems so that we can reach women and girls with the services and commodities they need where they live. It is simply unacceptable that today more than 200 million women who want family planning cannot get it.

Mr. President,

Since Cairo, we have made substantial progress in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment. Yet, in no part of the world is gender equality fully realized and in some places, existing gains risk being rolled back.

More women are in the workplace, but often in vulnerable and informal employment.

Women continue to be underrepresented in positions of power and decision-making.

Gender parity in secondary and tertiary education is yet to be achieved.

One out of every three women in the world, in every country and from every background, will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime.

Too many are not safe at school, not safe fetching water, not safe on a university campus, not even on the steps of a courthouse or in their own homes.

Discrimination and harmful traditions such as child marriage and female genital mutilation persist, and the perpetrators operate with impunity, even in the face of laws against such practices.

Each day's news brings home this reality in vivid detail. Another brutal gang rape, another battered woman, another girl dead from an utterly honourless killing, another young person lost to an unsafe abortion or to AIDS, another school empty....

Sexual violence on an epic scale as a weapon of war, a tactic of terror...

Is there a tipping point? When will we finally say 'enough' to violence and discrimination against women and girls?

When will we finally bring back our girls – all our girls and women – to school, to the workforce, to their rightful place alongside men and boys at the table where decisions are made, and away from child marriage, away from early pregnancy, away from HIV infection, away from violence and harmful practices that strip them of their dignity and in the worst cases deprive them of their lives?

Only then will we be able to build the future we all want. We cannot advance by leaving half of the population – our women and girls – behind.

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

We now have the largest generation of young people the world has ever seen. There can be no talk of sustainable development without adequate investments in their in their health, education and employment, without empowering them, equipping them with skills, agency and resilience.

Declining fertility rates are providing low- and middle-income countries with a window of opportunity to realize a demographic dividend, yet many young people are excluded from

development efforts. Today 40% of the world's unemployed are young people, and 60% of all young people in developing regions are without work, not studying, or engaged in irregular employment.

What little data we have on the state of young people's sexual and reproductive health and access to services and information show major concerns. Over 8.7 million unsafe abortions occurred among 15-24 year olds in developing countries in 2008, and 41 percent of all new HIV infections occurred in this same age group in 2009.

You hold the future of the world's young people in your hands. Invest in them because they hold the world's future in theirs.

We also need to ensure that older persons have access to social protection systems, health care and lifelong learning opportunities. As our societies age, we can reap a second demographic dividend by providing opportunities to older people to live their lives to the fullest.

This morning the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples opened in this hall. UNFPA will continue to work closely with Member States to help them meet the commitments they made during the regional ICPD review conferences to their indigenous populations so that they, like everyone else, enjoy their full human rights.

Mr. President,

Sustainability is about meeting the needs and aspirations of today's population while planning and making policy for tomorrow's. In no field is this more evident than population and development.

We must turn population trends into opportunities -- from youth bulge to youth bonus, from urban overload to vibrant, efficient urban centres, from internal displacement and refugee crises to making migration work for development. By supporting people's rights and empowerment, by

understanding population dynamics as they unfold, and by governing effectively and inclusively, we can realize these opportunities.

We face perhaps no greater challenge over the long term than climate change. Tomorrow, the Secretary-General will host a Climate Summit to build momentum towards a global agreement and to make the case for action on the ground. The ICPD review shows us we need to fundamentally change our patterns of consumption to slow the frenetic waste of natural resources and enrich prospects for dignity and equality for current and future generations. **Investing in universal public services is one of the most effective and just actions governments can take to create a foundation for equality and resource efficiency.**

As the debates and policies on population before the ICPD in 1994 demonstrated, large-scale global fears have too often overshadowed the human rights and freedoms of individuals and communities, and at worst have been used to justify constraints on human rights.

The 20-year review of implementation of the ICPD agenda has shown us that we must empower people to determine the course of their lives, to generate the innovations that will address climate change and other challenges, and to devise the policies that will advance us collectively into sustainability.

Our predecessors in Cairo understood this when they recognized that people are at the centre of sustainable development.

Over the past 20 years, we have seen power of people time and again.

The power of women able to decide by choice, not chance, whether and when to have children, and how many...

The power of young people – equipped with education, skills and opportunities – to contribute to and benefit from development.

The power of adolescent girls who challenge the status quo, against all odds, and resist early marriage, early motherhood and female genital mutilation, and instead embrace education and the opportunities it can bring...

The power of women pushing for change in their families, their communities, and their legislatures...

The power of men – husbands and fathers – pushing to educate their girls...

The power of older people in societies that respect and value their contributions....

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We cannot talk about sustainable development without ensuring that young people's needs are met, that we give voice to their aspirations, that we include them in decision-making.

We cannot talk about sustainable development without addressing women's empowerment, gender inequality, and discrimination and violence.

We cannot talk about sustainable development without ensuring the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all.

These issues must be at the heart of the Post-2015 agenda to ensure that current and future generations are made up of resilient, adaptive, innovative people capable of building resilient societies. **If we can do that, we will be able to address any challenge that our world faces, today and in the future.**

Thank you.