



47th session of the Commission on Population and Development

Opening remarks of

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Mr. Chairman,

Members of the Commission,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning! It gives me great pleasure to address this historic 47th Session of the Commission on Population and Development. Let me begin by commending the Chair of the Commission on Population and Development, Ambassador Gonzalo Koncke of Uruguay, and the members of the Bureau on their work in preparing this session of the CPD. I would also like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Wu Hongbo, and the Director of the Population Division, Mr. John Wilmoth for the important contributions of DESA and the Population Division to the ICPD review.

The ICPD Programme of Action changed forever how we perceive population and development. It moved population policies and programmes from a focus on numbers to a focus individual women and men. And in so doing, it ensured that our collective goals included all people, most particularly women and girls.

In part because of this great advance, today there are girls around the world who are able to learn about and have control over their bodies, to stay in school, find work and have children when they are ready – to their benefit, that of their families, and their societies.

The past two decades have seen remarkable progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action, as well as continual advancement of the ICPD agenda across many of its most vital areas.

At this CPD, Member States will follow through on the decision they took three years ago to “extend the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation beyond 2014, and ensure its follow-up in order to fully meet its goals and objectives.”

To aid the process, the General Assembly mandated a review of implementation.

The ICPD review, based on the voices and data of 176 Member States, input from civil society and comprehensive academic research, and covering the entire Programme of Action, as well as new challenges and opportunities, provides a powerful evidence base to support our work at this most critical juncture, as we shape our continued commitment to ICPD Beyond 2014.

The results of the ICPD Beyond 2014 review point us to a set of common principles that will allow us to deliver on GA Resolution 65/234 and truly and fully achieve the aims of the Programme of Action.

Ensuring a Foundation of Equality

Mr. Chairman,

There have been great gains in the past 20 years – in poverty reduction, girls’ education, maternal and child mortality, access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, protection of reproductive rights, and many other areas of the Programme of Action.

Yet these gains mask significant and growing inequalities, which are preventing the most vulnerable, marginalized and excluded among us – women and girls most particularly – from realizing their human rights as affirmed by the forward-looking Cairo consensus.

Too many people are being left behind – by growing income and wealth inequalities, by gender inequality and gender-based violence, by discrimination and stigma, by exclusion from participation in governance, and even by data and knowledge systems that fail to count or account for many of the most vulnerable people.

We have seen important aggregate gains in access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, with significant overall impacts on the health of women, girls and children. Yet in many countries, these gains have gone to those at the top of the income spectrum. The poor, in both rural and urban areas, continue to suffer from lack of access to services and from sexual and reproductive ill health.

What these overall gains mask are the stories of the excluded. They don’t tell the story of a young girl, married at age 11 to a man four times her age – a child whose human rights are brutally violated, along with her bodily integrity and dignity, whose childhood is cruelly ended. For what? For a price? To repay a debt? To settle a score between families? Because she is perceived as an economic burden? Because she is viewed as less worthy than her brothers?

They don't tell her story because she is invisible – too young to appear in surveys or statistics, and perhaps, like 1 in 3 children in developing countries, even her birth was never registered. Lacking this passport to protection, exercising her rights is all but impossible. She isn't counted; she isn't reached.

The outcome of this CPD, and the success of continued implementation of the Programme of Action, should be judged by whether we are able to reduce inequalities and to bring the promises of 1994 to all people – including, and especially, to that 11-year-old girl.

Dignity, Rights and Non-Discrimination for All, without Distinction of Any Kind

The ICPD Programme of Action reaffirmed that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, without distinction of any kind....”

Too often, though, individuals' dignity and rights are undermined by persistent discrimination, stigma and exclusion. The review finds that this discrimination has great cost to people and to society. Our guiding principle must be “without distinction of any kind.” For each woman, man and young person, and, especially, for those that experience marginalization, stigma or violence every day, the universality of human rights must be realized.

Again, let's think about that 11-year-old girl – perhaps the most marginalized of the marginalized. Her early marriage leads to early pregnancy, closing the door to education, life skills and economic opportunities, risking her health and wasting her human potential. This in turn jeopardizes the health, education and future of her children, perpetuating a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion. When multiplied by millions of marginalized adolescent girls like her, this creates a devastating ripple effect that puts global development itself at risk.

Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

For most of the world's women, young women in particular, the struggle for individual human rights and the freedom to decide on their personal future is far from won. The extent to which societies have tolerated the use of force and violence to sustain control over women, across diverse countries and all classes of society, is one of the great injustices of human history.

Our 11-year-old girl, still just a child, most likely does not fully understand the changes taking place in her own body. Married to a stranger, shut off from her family and without any social support network, she is unable to access the information and services she needs.

She is just one of millions of girls for whom puberty brings not only changes to their bodies but also new vulnerabilities to human rights abuses.

Globally, up to 50% of sexual assaults are committed against girls under the age of 16, and gender-based violence in schools is a significant factor in girls' drop-out rates.

Despite near-universal commitment to ending child marriage, one in three girls in developing countries is married before they turn 18 – one out of nine girls before their 15th birthday. Most of these girls are poor, less educated, and living in rural areas.

Nine out of 10 adolescent pregnancies take place in the context of early marriage. And pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls 15-19 in low- and middle-income countries.

A staggering 8.7 million young women aged 15 to 24 resort to unsafe abortions each year. But despite these statistics, discriminatory laws, practices and attitudes continue to keep women and young people, particularly adolescent girls, from accessing sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception, and realizing their reproductive rights.

In essence, what we are saying to these girls is: it's okay for you to be married; it's okay for you to have sex; it's okay for you to have children, but you are not old enough to have access to contraception. You are not old enough to have access to comprehensive sexuality education. You are not old enough to have control over your own body. This simply does not make sense. And we cannot shy away from these issues.

More than 200 million women in developing countries who want to delay or prevent pregnancy are not getting contraception. This has to end.

If women are to contribute to the enrichment and growth of society, to innovation and development, then they must have the opportunity to decide on the number and timing of their children, and to do so free from violence or coercion, with full confidence that pregnancy and childbirth will not result in illness, disability or death; and with confidence that their children will be healthy and survive.

The achievement of universal access to quality sexual and reproductive health and rights for all requires urgent renewed investments in strengthening health systems and in bringing these critical services to people where they live.

Development through the Life Course

One of the great strengths of the population and development perspective is an understanding of the transitions people make over the course of their lives – from childhood to adolescence and youth, from school to employment to forming families, from working age to ageing – and how important these transitions are for people and for societies.

Yet for young people around the world, particularly girls, these vital transitions are often diverted or interrupted – by child, early or forced marriage, unsafe abortion, adolescent pregnancy and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services. And the consequences in loss of health, empowerment, education and opportunities for work are profound.

Investing in young people is the key to sustainability. And how we meet the needs of young people now will greatly determine how societies adapt as they age.

If we can ensure that that 11-year-old girl stays in school, is protected from violence, early marriage and other harmful practices, has access to the information and means to protect herself from motherhood in childhood, is equipped with choices and opportunities, she and millions like her, along with their brothers, will become powerful agents for social change and will shape a better future for all of us.

Planning for Changing Populations

The world has seen a rise in diversity of population among countries, with vastly different trajectories of fertility, age structure, urbanization and migration.

In all countries, we need to understand and plan for population dynamics. This includes identifying the most vulnerable so that we can meet their needs and help them build their capabilities.

The urban transition happening in many countries is one of the most significant changes the world has ever seen. This transition can be one of the keys to sustainability, if we plan for it and ensure that its potential benefits truly extend to all people, urban and rural alike.

We also need to ensure that migration works for development and that the dignity and human rights of all migrants are respected.

Bringing the ICPD paradigm to the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

The findings of the ICPD review point to a way forward for action on population and development, one that will help achieve the aims set out in the General Assembly resolution for:

- A systematic, comprehensive and integrated approach to population and development
- That responds to new challenges and the changing development environment
- And that reinforces the integration of population and development into global processes related to development.

The GA resolution clearly recognized the importance of ICPD for development and for the Post-2015 agenda. The findings of the review provide profound and wide-ranging evidence of these links.

By bridging individual dignity and rights with collective sustainability, the Cairo Agenda, its subsequent implementation and the framework for action of the review can help guide the way to achieving many of the aims of the Post-2015 process and sustainable development.

This week during the CPD, Member States have the opportunity to reaffirm these links and ensure that the gains of the ICPD are carried forward in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Now is the time to reaffirm the core message of the ICPD – that individual dignity and human rights are the path to a resilient, sustainable future.

We have come a long way down this path since Cairo. Let us re-commit ourselves to completing the journey and to bringing everyone – including that 11-year-old girl – along with us.

Our collective future hinges on the actions we take today to protect and uphold her rights, and to ensure a life of dignity and well-being for all people everywhere, a world where everyone is empowered to contribute to and share equally in the benefits of development, a world where everyone counts.

That is what the ICPD is all about. That is the path to sustainability and to a better world for all of us.

Thank you.