Mr. President, Executive Director Dr. Osotimehin, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finland would like to thank the Executive Director for the report on progress in the implementation of the first year of the UNFPA strategic plan for 2014-2017.

The new strategic plan puts sexual and reproductive health and realization of reproductive rights at the centre of the Fund’s work, and much has been achieved. We welcome UNFPA’s efforts in achieving the targets as well as its leadership in building new partnerships while strengthening the existing ones.

However, we still face great challenges in addressing all areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights which are part of our uninfraigible human rights. In particular, we must pay attention to the huge population of young people and children, whose educational and development needs cannot be met, unless they are healthy and their rights are fulfilled.

Children must be able to go to school, learn and gain the skills they need – to become productive and empowered adults. Especially girls need our full focus. Great advances have been made in girls’ education at the primary level, but at the secondary level, girls fall behind. Why? Too often it is because girls become pregnant, are forced to marry, or their education is neglected.

To achieve goals of gender equality, which underpin all other development objectives, it is critical to guarantee women’s and girls’ access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including good quality accessible services, modern contraceptives and comprehensive sexuality education. We made a good compromise in the Open Working Group proposal leading to the Sustainable Development Goals after 2015, and we are looking forward to taking the gender and SRHR agenda even further when we gear for 2030. At this point, we must pay special attention to getting priority indicators in place, in order to ensure that the right things get measured and that accountability issues are well catered for. Protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights of all individuals not only saves lives and empowers people, but it also leads to significant economic gains for individuals, families, and nations. It has been shown
to reduce overall healthcare costs, to improve productivity, and to increase rates of education, leading to greater economic growth.

Mr. President,

Let me now turn to more specific parts of the report.

Finland fully supports the processes to implement the new strategic plan and to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of the organization as reported.

With growing demands on the development landscape, Finland appreciates the efforts of UNFPA to concentrate on interventions with the greatest potential impact, helping countries with the highest needs and the lowest financing ability. We support the Fund’s policy to encourage countries with fewer needs and greater abilities to finance their own programmes, allowing UNFPA to focus on advocacy and policy support.

In this regard, country offices were asked to realign their programmes to the new strategic plan during 2014 and 2015, and so far 87 per cent have completed at least 90 per cent of the alignment plans. We look forward to continued work in aligning the remaining programmes.

We commend UNFPA for improving the quality of country programmes – with the increase from 45 percent in 2013 to 64 per cent in 2014 – in the number of country programmes meeting the quality criteria. We urge the Fund to continue to improve the quality of country programming by strengthening monitoring and evaluation. We also look forward to further developments in allocating appropriate financial and human resources for evaluation.

We need UNFPA to create a culture of learning and knowledge sharing, and to encourage ability to adopt and change. These are essential elements for the Fund and its staff in order for UNFPA to make a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, I would like to express, Finland’s full support to the work of UNFPA and its continuous efforts to further enhance its ability to deliver on its mandate.

Thank you.