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Statement
By
Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin
Executive Director of UNFPA
United Nations Population Fund

44TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Agenda Item 5: General Debate on the Further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in light of its twentieth anniversary

New York, 13 April 2011

Mr. Chairman,
Dr. Nafis Sadik,
Under-Secretary-General Sha Zukang,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentleman,

As our world approaches a population of 7 billion with at least 2 billion more people expected by mid-century, our greatest challenge is meeting the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This is a central premise of sustainable development.

Since the beginning of this session of the Commission on Population and Development, we have heard many arguments highlighting the centrality of fertility and reproductive health to development.

The decision taken by UN Member States in December to extend the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014 reaffirms the centrality of population to sustainable development.

The extension of ICPD beyond 2014 also reaffirms the unfinished nature of this visionary roadmap.

Two figures that highlight this unfinished agenda are the 215 million women in developing countries who want to plan and space their births but lack access to modern contraception, and the 358,000 women who continue to die, not from a disease, but from the most natural act of bringing new life into the world.

Since Monday, we have heard repeatedly, and we know from experience, that improving sexual and reproductive health requires strengthened health systems, and it also requires improvements in the status of girls and women.

We must focus on human rights, including the right to sexual and reproductive health, and women's rights, as well as principles of equity and social justice, to guide our collective efforts for sustainable development.

We also know from experience that changes in mindsets, norms, and actions require a culturally sensitive approach to human rights, one that takes into account the local culture and builds on positive values.

Now having said that, I would like to stress that the debate on population and development is not about numbers, it is about people. Yes, numbers, data, projections and trends are important in providing an evidence base, in highlighting progress and gaps, and in guiding policies, plans and investments.

But in the end, it is the kinds of investments that empower individuals to make their own decisions that have an impact on demographic trends such as population growth.

In the end, it is the choices and opportunities enjoyed by individuals that determine population dynamics. These choices, and the policies that support them, have an impact on our ecological footprint and on the quality of life of people that leads to sustainable development, protecting our environment.

The action plans from both Rio and Cairo recognize poverty reduction -- "quality of life for all people" and "human well-being equitably shared by all people" -- as essential development objectives. Both recognize the need for sustainable production and consumption, hallmark of the green economy, as well as population-related policies.

Mr. Chairman,

Today human activity is affecting every part of the planet, including its climate. And people in developing nations with limited resources, who contributed the least to climate change, are likely to suffer the worst of its consequences.

Climate related disasters are increasing—from drought to floods, to heat waves and hurricanes. And there are growing concerns about millions of environmental migrants.

Today rising populations, coupled with environmental stress and unsustainable production and consumption, are testing the limits of food and water security.

Modern food production contributes to depleting the water table. And poverty forcing people to find fuel and firewood degrades the land.

Today millions of people lack adequate sanitation, which poses a significant threat to health, well-being and dignity.

Our world is home to the largest generation of young people. And we face an energy crisis as sources such as oil are not only finite but also damaging to our environment.

Mr. Chairman,

I raise these issues today not to alarm but to stress the centrality of population dynamics as a defining principle that informs the interaction between people and the environment. We see this principle as we observe unprecedented urbanization.

Almost all future population growth will be absorbed by cities of the developing world, which are unprepared for such rapid expansion. Planning needs to begin now to take advantage of the many benefits cities can offer.

While cities concentrate poverty, they also provide the best means of escaping it, and they hold the possibility of being more environmentally sustainable.

Whether we can live together in health and dignity on a healthy planet will depend on the choices and decisions we make now.

As Mr. John Bongaarts pointed out in his keynote address on Monday, the development consequences of high fertility countries include unemployment; poverty; slow economic growth; depletion of natural resources; high rates of maternal and child mortality; lagging investment in education, health and human capital; and potential for civil strife.

This is hardly a recipe for sustainable development.

But neither is the model that is defined by excessive consumption, high risks in financial markets, and the unsustainable use and production of energy that is changing our climate.

Mr. Chairman,

The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development continues to point us in the right direction.

In the days and months ahead leading up to 2014 and the 20th anniversary review of the International Conference on Population and Development, UNFPA will do its utmost to ensure that population, reproductive health and gender equality are prioritized at next month's Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the High-level meeting on HIV and AIDS, the International Youth Conference, as well as Rio + 20.

My colleagues and I will do our best to ensure that the ICPD @ 20 process is participatory and inclusive so that the review reflects realities on the ground and addresses the rights and needs of the world's people. I thank you.