

Statement by Margaret J. Pollack, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, and Head of the United States Delegation to the United Nations Commission on Population and Development, March 31, 2009

As prepared for delivery.

Madam Chair,

I am honored to be here today to express the renewed and deep commitment of the United States Government to the goals and aspirations of the ICPD Program of Action. President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton, and Ambassador Rice as well as the United States Congress, have already acted strongly to support women's and young people's health, human rights, and empowerment; global partnership; and the wider development agenda embraced by the Program of Action.

We salute the many governments here, as well as non-governmental and international organizations, for the important work you have done to implement the Program of Action. The United States applauds your leadership, and recognizes your expertise. We all know that much remains to be done to accomplish these internationally agreed goals and we stand ready to work in partnership with all of you this week to set priorities and commit to strong effective actions.

Madam Chair, my delegation would like to thank the Secretariat for the documents provided in preparation for this meeting. We have a strong platform from which to begin our deliberations. We would like to emphasize that the Program of Action provides guidance for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and that achieving these goals requires that we achieve the ICPD goals, most particularly universal access to sexual and reproductive health and the protection and promotion of reproductive rights. Further, we agree with the ICPD Program of Actions recognition of the critical importance of meeting the needs and protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the largest-ever generation of adolescents. We also support the ICPD understanding that the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women must be protected, so that women can make their own health and fertility decisions, which helps to ensure healthy, productive families and communities as well as sustainable, prosperous, and stable societies.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our common task this week is vital. Five years remain in both the ICPD and the MDG mandates. We can, this week, commit to stronger actions to reach our common goals. We must do much more to provide comprehensive, accurate information and education on sexuality, sexual and reproductive health for women, men, girls, and boys as they age and their needs evolve. We must, as well, foster equal partnerships and sharing of responsibilities by all family members in all areas of family life, including in sexual and reproductive life, and promote frank discourse on sexuality, including in relation to sexual health and reproduction. We must also acknowledge the direct link between population dynamics and the ability to reach development outcomes.

We need to also prioritize comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, as defined in the Program of Action and the Key Actions for its further implementation, in our work to strengthen health systems. The cluster of services agreed in the Program of Action are all essential to save women's lives and secure their health as well as protect their reproductive rights. The United States is committed to ensuring, among others:

- access to safe, effective, and affordable, methods of voluntary family planning through good quality care that provides full information and respects the client's choices;
- the range of services needed during pregnancy as well as skilled attendants for delivery and after birth; and
- diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

The United States is firmly committed to reproductive health services. In his first week in office, President Obama rescinded the "Mexico City Policy," which had made it more difficult for women in developing countries receiving U.S. assistance to access reproductive health information and services. In doing so, the President made clear that we should be supporting programs that help women and their partners make decisions to ensure their health and the health of their families.

In addition, last week we announced that the U.S. will once again fund UNFPA, contributing \$50 million this fiscal year as provided in the Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2009, a 130% increase over our last contribution in 2001. Congress has also approved \$545 million in bilateral assistance for family planning. This is a significant increase over last year. I highlight this fact to underscore the U.S. commitment to development assistance. Be assured that, even in these uncertain economic times, the U.S. will not retreat from this commitment.

Madame Chair, the disproportionate burdens that girls and women bear in the HIV/AIDS pandemic convey more loudly than words how far the world still has to go to end the sexual coercion, violence, discrimination and pervasive gender inequalities, including in family life, that make girls and young women especially vulnerable to infection and force them to carry the heavy load of care as both family members and health care workers. The United States, through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), is a strong supporter of linkages between HIV/AIDS and voluntary family planning programs. Particularly in areas with high HIV prevalence and strong voluntary family planning systems, PEPFAR supports confidential HIV counseling and testing within family planning sites, including linking women who test HIV-positive with HIV care and treatment. PEPFAR also supports referrals to family planning programs for women in HIV/AIDS treatment and care programs, and we will take concrete steps to work toward improving the link between HIV/AIDS activities and sexual and reproductive health. Given that 60 percent of people on PEPFAR-supported antiretroviral treatment are women, many of whom are in their reproductive years, there is an opportunity to further strengthen coordination among these efforts.

With respect to human rights, the U.S. Department of State recently announced that the U.S. has joined 66 other UN member states in supporting the statement on "Human Rights, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity" read out in the plenary meeting of the General Assembly on

December 18, 2008. This signals our collective support of the statement's main objective – the condemnation of human rights violations based on sexual orientation and gender identity, just as we condemn any other failure to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Obama Administration has further signaled its re-engagement on the domestic front by creating the White House Council on Women and Girls. This new office will provide leadership and initiative on a broad range of issues, including women's and girls' health, empowerment and human rights, helping to ensure that we fulfill our promise to address the persistent challenges that have been too long ignored. One priority for this Administration is ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In doing so, we will establish an inter-agency process to review the language and consult with the legislative branch of the U.S. Government which will ultimately need to ratify the Convention.

Madam Chair, in conclusion, the United States pledges our constructive engagement in our common purpose this week, and in the years to come, as we work in partnership to fully implement the Program of Action and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Thank you.