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Commission on Population and Development

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Mr/Madam Chair

The world's population is due to reach 7 billion just as we anticipate reaching the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. A child born when the Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000 will be an adolescent in 2015. What do we know about that millennium child?

He or she is most likely to live in a developing nation along with almost 90 per cent of all children under age 18. Children born in the year 2000 were much less likely to die in infancy or childhood than those born a generation earlier. In 2006, we turned a corner when under-five mortality fell below 10 million for the first time in history, and has continued to fall.

But while the advances toward MDG 4 – which aims to reduce child mortality – are encouraging in many countries, those for MDG 5 have been stubbornly resistant to change. The number of women who die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth is still alarmingly high, and the discrepancies between rich and poor countries are striking.

A woman in a least developed country is 300 times more likely to die from childbirth or complications than her peer in an industrialized nation. A newborn in a least developed country is 14 times more likely to die within the first 28 days of life than his counterpart in the world's wealthiest nation. Around the world, every year, more than half a million women die as a result of pregnancy or childbirth complications, including about 70,000 girls and young women aged 15 to 19. Since 1990, complications related to pregnancy and childbirth have killed an estimated 10 million women.

What needs to be done? UNICEF's flagship publication State of the World's Children focused its 2009 edition on maternal health. The report argues that a pivotal component of improving outcomes for women and children is strengthening health systems. Integrating ante-natal care, care for maternal malnutrition and anemia, skilled attendance at childbirth, access to emergency obstetric care and community-level integration of essential services for mothers, newborns and young children such as exclusive breastfeeding, immunization, insecticide-treated bed nets, water and vitamin supplementation can save the lives of thousands of women and children under five who die each day.

Estimates from international household surveys such as Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys indicate that there is a huge unmet need for contraception and family planning among women of reproductive age. Only 29

per cent of women in their childbearing years¹ who are in committed relationships use contraception in the least developed countries. In West and Central Africa, that figure drops to 17 per cent.

Prevention of unintended pregnancy is a central element of United Nations guidance on prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV. The challenge is to redouble efforts to prevent HIV infection in women in general and integrate family planning into HIV programmes. One unexpected consequence of widespread access to anti-retroviral drugs is that HIV-positive women on treatment become more fertile. Information about the risks of pregnancy for seropositive women, combined with increased access to and information about condoms and other forms of contraception is a vital part of bringing about an AIDS-free generation, in which vertical transmission is virtually unknown.

¹ SOWC, aged 15-49.

Maternal and child survival require close integration of HIV prevention and treatment, family planning, and reproductive and sexual health with maternal and neo-natal health services. We need to be sure that women who are tested for HIV in order to prevent transmission of the virus to their newborns are also tested to determine if they are eligible for treatment.

A family and community centered approach to maternal and neo-natal health can also help delay early or forced marriage, keep girls in school and provide skills for the labour market. Alongside improved access to health services and external support systems, education plays a powerful role. Improved school enrollment not only reduces the vulnerability of girls and young women to HIV infection, but it also empowers both girls and boys to make informed decisions in their lives, including on how to best plan families and negotiate sexual relationships.

The United Nations Children's Fund is proud to be doing its part to promote the integration and improvement of maternal and child health, within the family of organizations supporting the goals of the Commission on Population and Development.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important meeting.