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**STATEMENT  
by  
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SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE 2012 UN CONFERENCE  
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**44<sup>TH</sup> 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,  
Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentleman,

Much of today's development agenda was set during a series of international conferences convened by the United Nations in the 1990s.

Two of these focused specifically on sustainable development - the Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992 and the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994.

The themes and goals of these two conferences were very much intertwined.

Their objective was to achieve balance among the economic, social and environmental spheres of development – and to ensure that present actions do not endanger the well-being of future generations.

As we approach the twentieth anniversary of these conferences, major gaps remain and many of their targets will not be met by the deadlines that were set. The multiple challenges we face now are closely inter-linked, more so today than ever before.

For this reason, the General Assembly decided to convene the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and to extend the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014.

This is why we are gathered today – to discuss the ICPD’s implementation moving forward and to examine the synergies between the two agendas.

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, will take place next June. Rio+20 can be captured by 1, 2, 3 – one focused political document; two themes (a green economy, for short, and the institutional framework for sustainable development); and 3 objectives (renewing political commitment, assessing progress and gaps in implementation, and identifying new and emerging challenges).

As Secretary-General of this Conference, I wish to share with you my perspective on the critical role of population in sustainable development.

Looking back, there is much progress that we should be proud of. During the second half of the twentieth century, the world population grew at unprecedented rates, yet per capita incomes tripled and world output increased nearly sevenfold.

At the turn of the century, world leaders pledged to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty globally. They also undertook to improve the health, nutrition and education of billions within a mere 15 years.

Until the recent financial and economic crises, many countries were on track to meet these Millennium Development Goals and some achieved remarkable progress in achieving several of them.

While global economic growth is expected to recover in 2011 and 2012, the pace of recovery is slow and uneven. At the expected pace of recovery, it would take at least five years to return to the pre-crisis level of global employment and regain the more than 30 million jobs that were lost during the crisis..

At the same time, we are also witnessing increased frequency of extreme weather conditions, likely linked to climate change. Climate change adversely affects the low-income countries disproportionately. These crises and challenges have provoked a re-evaluation of development priorities and requirements for long-term sustainability.

Let us consider the most basic human need: food. Millions of people spend more than half of their income on food. For them, recent food price rises have meant a return to extreme poverty. The world is still capable of feeding each of its 7 billion people, but price rises and volatility make it more difficult to ensure that all people get the calories they need.

Furthermore, the growth in the yields of staple crops has been slowing down due to long neglect of the food and agriculture sector. The problem is exacerbated by more frequent droughts and floods. Crop yields need to rise in order to ensure food security, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet given the increasing constraints on the availability of land, water and modern energy, it is not certain that yields can rise rapidly enough.

Lack of water, in particular, is a serious issue. Agriculture increasingly competes with cities for access to water.

Another major constraint for development is access to energy. Without significant investments in infrastructure and technology, the number of energy-poor people will increase. And to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic climate change, more of us will have to rely on renewable energy.

Energy use is not proportionate to population growth, but it is related to incomes. So if the incomes of the bottom half of humanity are to rise, access to energy needs to increase as well.

The experts who work on projecting future demand for food, water and energy base their scenarios on projections of population growth. This will not come as a surprise to any of you here.

And the vast majority of experts “modelling” the future assume that population growth will continue to decline until it reaches zero around 2050. This is what is claimed in the medium variant of the official United Nations projections.

Since my Department produces those projections, we are pleased that most people trust them. However, I have been advised that these projections are based on a very important assumption: that fertility will continue declining, wherever it is still above 2 children per woman, until it reaches 1.85 children per woman, a value well below replacement level.

That is, population stabilization within this century is feasible only if every population sees its fertility reduced to below-replacement level.

Given that fertility decline has been slow in a number of least developed countries and that fertility may stagnate in other countries, it is by no means certain that all countries will reach sufficiently low levels of fertility by 2050. If fertility were to stop declining at 2.35 children per woman, instead of dropping below 2, the population of the world could reach well over 10 billion by 2050, and continue increasing over the rest of the century.

Ensuring that 9 billion people have enough food and energy by 2050 already appears as a major challenge. Imagine how much greater the challenge would be if the world population surpasses 10 billion by mid-century.

Here lies the most intricate issue, that is - the inter-linkages between socio-economic progress and fertility – a linkage I highlighted in my remarks at the opening of the Commission’s session. The historical evidence suggests that they go hand in hand. Fertility rates are generally higher among the poor and in poor countries. High rates of infant mortality, lack of social protection, lack of access to reproductive health and a host of socio-economic factors in turn contribute to higher fertility rates among the poor.

Thus, the discussion on fertility and population growth cannot be carried out in isolation. It is an issue at the root of sustainable development. It has everything to do with whether we are able to achieve socially equitable and environmentally sustainable economic progress.

This brings me back to the synergies between the further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and Rio+20 that I highlighted at the beginning of my remarks. Accelerated implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action must be an integral part of overall efforts for poverty reduction and sustainable development. The extension of the Programme of Action beyond 2014 is therefore welcome. However, it should be accompanied by a firm commitment to ensure that sustainable development goals and objectives are met soon, especially by the countries that are farthest behind

Mr. Chairman,

Member States are aware of this inter-linkage. In the preparatory process of Rio+20, they have identified population growth as a critical emerging challenge for sustainable development. It is strongly hoped that at Rio in 2012 the outcome of the Conference will be a focused political document that will effectively address, among other critical elements, the demographic dynamics.

Consequently, this Commission has the responsibility to take the lead on the issue of population growth and the related challenge of urbanization. You must ensure that they remain high on the agenda of the General Assembly, as it assesses the status of implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

I fully trust this Commission will fulfil its responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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