



United Nations Forty-fourth Commission on Population and Development

New York, USA
11 - 15 April 2011

Statement Delivered by the representative of the World Health Organization

Mr Chairman and Distinguished Delegates,

The World Health Organization, recognizing the crucial role of sexual and reproductive health on development, welcomes the focus of the forty-fourth Commission on Population and Development, on linkages between reproductive health, fertility and development. Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, especially those related to health, is strongly underpinned by the progress that can be made on sexual and reproductive health.

Improved sexual and reproductive health is a key pillar of the overall health and empowerment of individuals and development of societies. Ill-health from causes related to sexual and reproductive health, including too many, too early and too frequent pregnancies remains a major cause of death and disability among women, particularly in low-income countries. Poor sexual and reproductive health contributes significantly to poverty limiting socio-economic development.

The WHO World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolution 57.12¹, adopted the *Global reproductive health strategy*, that is based on the principles of the International Conference on Population and Development and its Programme of Action, which among other things, calls upon governments "to strengthen the capacity of health systems to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health care ". World Health Organization assesses and reports on progress in implementation of the *Global reproductive health strategy* every two years since its adoption in 2004, and supports actions to accelerate progress based on gaps identified.

Despite progress in aspects of reproductive health including family planning, maternal and perinatal health and addressing sexually transmitted infections

¹ Reproductive health: Strategy to accelerate progress towards the attainment of international development goals and targets, WHA57.12, 22 May 2004.

including HIV, much more needs to be done to address existing and even-increasing inequalities between and within regions and countries, and achieving universal access to reproductive health. Addressing these gaps will require the consideration of the broad sexual and reproductive health concept that, in addition to ensuring a health care system able to provide access to evidence-based interventions across the full spectrum of sexual and reproductive health care, equitable provision of these according to the needs and with full respect to human rights. In this respect, effective health care delivery strategies that take into account the demand side factors have to be devised, to ensure receipt of care by all who need, usually being the most vulnerable segments of the populations.

Mr Chair, my Department, hosting the co-sponsored Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction, HRP, realizes the urgency with which these gaps have to be addressed. HRP, as a global entity for research, research synthesis and capacity strengthening in sexual and reproductive health, responds to the needs of low and middle income settings. By identifying needs, testing interventions, and evaluating mechanisms for delivering evidence-based interventions through implementation research, HRP strengthens evidence base for supporting policies, programmes and delivery of health care for accelerated progress in universal access to reproductive health and advancing the ICPD agenda.

It is necessary to expedite our efforts to turn the various commitments and global strategies into reality for individuals, especially for women and young people. Our response and rhetoric need to be within the context of the reality many of these individuals face for example, in terms having unplanned pregnancies often because of limited and no access to contraception, or sexual abuse or coercion; in terms of failing to survive a pregnancy or childbirth; or in terms of perishing from complications of unsafe abortions. Addressing these will require in the first instance supporting people to fulfil their fertility intentions, which in turn will advance development.

I thank you Mr Chairman.