

**Statement by UN Women
Commission on Population and Development
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Chairperson
Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

UN Women commends the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) and its focus on adolescence and youth this year. The Commission provides invaluable and timely evidence on population and development status and trends related to gender equality and the empowerment of young women and girls. CPD is a key contributor for effectively mainstreaming a gender perspective in norms, policies and programmes.

CPD data help reveal the new faces of adolescent girls and young women in the context of ongoing changes in the economies, the environment, population movements and related challenges such as accelerating inequalities. UN Women lauds the inclusion of under-reported age groups such as 10-14 years and its due emphasis of those married before the age of 18 as it helps to identify girls most at risk of child and forced marriage, physical abuse, sexual coercion, unprotected sex and exploitative labour.

UN Women promotes such disaggregation of demographic data, not only by sex and age but also other determinants of well-being and empowerment such as health, education, employment, residence, protection and safety, access to rights, participation and access to decision-making and community support. Collecting and reporting findings on these issues at the national and sub-national level, is essential for presenting an accurate picture of the situation of girls and for accelerating progress in addressing specific challenges facing groups of girls in vulnerable contexts.

On one hand, we see emerging a girl of the 21st century who is increasingly educated, married at later age with later pregnancy and childbearing, who is fully ready to work, who migrates for study and for work, and who is keen on playing a leadership role in society. Yet, as CPD research shows, in comparison with young men and boys, the adolescent girl in the 21st century is often impeded in her potential and entitlements. By being married too early and without her consent, by becoming mother at too young an age and with no advance planning, by being denied satisfaction of her basic needs for family planning and age-appropriate sexuality education, by being unduly exposed to harmful and discriminatory practices, violence, abuse, risk of infections to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, girls are denied access to basic freedoms and human rights.

Too many girls are still regarded as 'less valuable', due to deeply-ingrained biases, inequality and discrimination against women across the world. Too many girls are exposed to pressure and stereotypes through advertising and the Internet. The crushing weight of gender discrimination and extreme poverty can be a toxic and sometimes lethal combination for adolescent girls, especially in conflict and humanitarian crisis. Even at home, in schools and in intimate relationships, girls are violated where they should be safe and nurtured.

The research before this Commission also shows how the vulnerabilities of young men and boys are exacerbated by traditional gender roles and stereotypes on masculinities, leading to increased risk of HIV/AIDS, violence and other harmful behaviours. Since it is during childhood and adolescence that boys and girls internalize and rehearse the gender roles they will assume as men and women, helping boys and young men question traditional male socialization and providing them with decent livelihood options will

foster more equal relationships between men and women and reduce the risks that young men currently face.

At UN Women, we know that with the right support for their safe transition into adulthood, girls and young women can make significant contributions to economic and social development and join the ranks of political leadership. Despite the multiple challenges they face, adolescent girls are resilient, driven by the hope of better prospects to fulfill their dreams. Girls increasingly feel entitled to their human rights and life opportunities at par with young men and boys. Today more and more girls succeed in completing high levels of education; they use new information and communication technologies, including the social media, to be informed and dynamic agents of social change. Thus, investing in adolescent girls is one of the smartest investments any country can make, not only for accelerating progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment, but also for sustainable development, peace and security and the promotion of human rights, overall.

The outcomes and the guidance by the Commission on the Status of Women offer a clear roadmap to create an empowering, safe, supportive, socially inclusive environment for the girl child. The forthcoming operational review of the International Programme of Action, the development of the post-2015 development agenda and the 20-year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, provide further avenues to drive this agenda forward.

To support this transformation, UN Women works with the UN system, Member States and civil society organizations to ensure:

- The ratification and implementation of human rights instruments with regards to youth at the national, sub-national and local levels;
- The adoption of rights-based approaches in policies, legislation, budgets, administration of justice and programming for the empowerment of the girl child, with special attention to groups of marginalized and disadvantaged girls;
- The enactment and enforcement of legislation to protect adolescents and youth against gender-based violence including in situations of conflict or humanitarian crisis;
- Long-term investments in programmes that promote the empowerment of girls, universal access to education and health services, their safety and their participation in decision-making;
- The involvement of men and boys in efforts to fight gender-based discrimination and violence and other rights violations against women and girls;
- The production of gender statistics and research to identify marginalized and disadvantaged girls;
- The development of institutional capacities to create enabling, safe environments for girl children, including youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and educational content and settings amenable to human rights and access to decent work opportunities.

UN Women also aims to improve coordination across, and accountability of UN entities working with youth and on youth issues, through its leadership and membership in several youth-related inter-agency mechanisms and through its support to the collaborative development of standards, protocols and strategies.

The UN, Member States and their partners have a tremendous responsibility and opportunity to do more and better for the world's adolescent girls and young women.

Thank you.