Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Delegation of Malta, we would like to congratulate you, and the other members of the Bureau, for your work during this session of the Commission, and we augur that under your able leadership this session will come to a successful end. We also share the views expressed by the European Union in its statement, however we would like to make the following remarks in our national capacity.

Mr. Chairman,

We meet here today 20 years following the establishment of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and to review progress on the implementation of this programme of action.

For many years now, UN Member States have worked tirelessly to address the many critical issues which the world population continues to face. Indeed the ICPD has brought to the forefront a myriad of human centred areas where progress has to take place for the sake of global sustainability. In this regard, the ICPD identified the linkages between population and development and has been the basis of many international, regional and local policies, programmes and strategies.

As clearly stated in the Progress Report of the Secretary General on the status of the implementation of the ICPD, there has been uneven progress. Whilst we have achieved a reduction of people living in extreme poverty, there is growing divide between high-earning and low-earning sectors of the population.

The Government of Malta remains committed to the full and proper implementation of the ICPD, which remains relevant today as it was upon its adoption twenty years ago. Malta, like all other United Nations Member States strives to continue achieving progress in this important area. We would like to highlight a few national areas where more progress has been achieved.

We should first of all keep in mind the different realities that our countries face with populations growth and structure. With an average 1,300 persons per square kilometre Malta has one of the highest population densities in the world. This is indeed a unique challenge for Malta, putting a lot of pressure on the resources and infrastructure available. In this context an ageing population represents one of the most significant demographic and socioeconomic developments and challenges we currently face. A reality present in Malta and globally.
Nearly a quarter of the total population of Malta is 60 years old and over. Population ageing presents social, economic and cultural challenges to individuals, families and societies. However it also presents opportunities. Rather than perceiving the rising number of older persons as an excessive burden on available welfare programmes, population ageing should be considered as an achievement. It is an indicator of socioeconomic progress, a result of the science and public policy that is extending human lives and emphasising success in maintaining improved levels of health, independence, and autonomy well into the latter years. This is complemented by the recent launch of a National Strategy on Active Ageing.

On the other end of the life spectrum, we should also look at the younger generation. It is ever more challenging for them to reach their goals and aspirations. The ICPD was key in linking the importance of youth and education. In fact, education and employment are crucial for the youth to aspire for a better future. Our responsibility is to create education and training that is more relevant to the young people's needs, encouraging them to exchange ideas and cultures across borders by studying or training in another country.

Sexual and reproductive health education and promotion are also central to human development. The Programme of Action established 20 years was a balanced document that incorporated the sensitivities of the different cultural and societal realities across the globe. There is no doubt that in the last two decades there has been a global increase of awareness of sexual and reproductive health. In this regard, Malta believes that we should address this matter holistically and cover issues related to physical, emotional, social and cultural aspects. This is indeed the central goal of Malta Sexual Health Strategy, to improve prevention, information, education and services to all people of all ages and backgrounds to address and reduce inequalities in sexual health.

Mr. Chairman,

Sexual orientation and gender identity remains a highly important element in the Government’s strategy and it seeks to ensure that any issues relating to sexual health of the various population groups in Malta remains at the highest possible level. To strengthen this view, the Government of Malta has introduced legislation to legalise civil union for same-sex couples, as well as to give them full rights under the law. This is an important step in our social development, and is expected to become law in the coming weeks.

Mr. Chairman,

Since the adoption of the ICPD, modern and effective methods of contraception have become widely available and easily accessible. The Government has also continued its fight against STDs and other medical issues through strengthening the dedicated GU Clinic, that serves sexual and reproductive health needs of the whole population through specialised medical attention as required, and with full confidentiality to patients of any age.

Mr. Chairman,

Malta believes that the best way to address a variety of sexual and reproductive health issues is through education. Malta has recently concluded a set of guidelines for teachers and schools to encourage updated and specific sexual reproductive health and rights education. The aim of these guidelines is to provide all students with tailor made comprehensive sexuality education. Furthermore, to enable access of information to the younger generation, a new website containing information on sexual health and reproductive matters has been recently launched.

Mr. Chairman,

It is however regrettable to note that in the past years the ICPD has only been linked with Chapter 7 – reproductive rights and reproductive health. Though the ICPD was the first and only document to define these rights while also respecting the ethical discourse that surrounds this subject nowadays we are faced with attempts to redefine the spirit and balance of Chapter 7.
As it did in Cairo twenty years ago, Malta would like to reaffirm today its position that any discussion of rights and services in connection with reproductive health cannot take place outside the framework of one of the most fundamental of human rights – the right to life. Malta strongly believes that the right to life extends to the unborn child from the moment of conception, and that therefore the use of abortion as a means of resolving health or social problems is a denial of that right.

It is within this framework of human rights – the right to life – that Malta has in these last fifteen years held high the Cairo Declaration and the Programme of Action. It is in this spirit and commitment that Malta will continue to implement the ICPD values and objectives. We would like to recall that paragraph 8.25 of the ICPD clearly states that abortion should in no way be considered as a method of family planning, while also recalling that the letter and spirit of the ICPD is clear that the document seeks to eliminate the use of abortion through the availability and use of modern and effective methods of contraception. Malta is therefore convinced that its continued implementation of the ICPD conforms to the letter and spirit of what was agreed by all of us twenty years ago in Cairo, and continues to reaffirm its position that Malta will continue to build upon its successes in tackling these sensitive areas for the benefit of its population.

Mr. Chairman,

20 years after the International Conference on Population and Development, we are now faced with new growing challenges. We now need to look ahead at the next steps that will be required to address the major issues of population development. This is the time to act. We see the Post 2015 development framework as an opportunity to build on the successes of the ICPD and a means to address the gaps in order to promote and protect the human rights for all, strengthen the rule of law and improve the lives of all in the context of sustainable development.

I thank you.