



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

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Commission on Population and Development
Forty-eighth Session, 13-17 April 2015
Agenda item 4

Mme Chair,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

On behalf of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), I thank you for the opportunity to address this audience and welcome the topic of the forty-eighth session.

The new sustainable development agenda comes at a time when demographic trends are transforming the Arab region – its population has doubled over the past three decades and is projected to increase by two-thirds to reach 604 million by 2050. The region is also characterized by sizeable youth and working age populations, in addition to soaring urbanization rates and high levels of migration and forced displacement. These dynamics are exerting serious pressures on the environment and public services, and are disproportionately affecting women and girls as well as other vulnerable socio-demographic groups.

Since devoting significant efforts to review the progress of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) back in 2013 and leading up to the preparatory processes to negotiate and agree the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ESCWA has taken an active role in preparing Arab countries for negotiations at global level and converging perspectives towards a shared regional position on the proposed SDGs. In parallel to this, significant efforts have been made to target national population councils of Arab countries to raise awareness of the importance of integrating population perspectives in development programming and to strengthen their capacity to inform intergovernmental deliberations on the post-2015 agenda.

Mme Chair, ESCWA believes that the post-2015 framework as proposed by the OWG is not only an essential tool for achieving the future we want but it also represents a unique opportunity for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. And yet, despite its comprehensive nature, important population issues pertaining to our member states are not explicitly included.

Amid the process of negotiating the new goals, we have witnessed unprecedented forced displacement in the region as a result of ongoing crises, notably, in the Syrian Arab Republic but also in Libya and Iraq, and most recently in Yemen. The post-2015 framework must have, at its core, population dimensions that reflect the conditions, situation and empirical reality of the Arab region. Critical population groups such as forced migrants will require special attention should we capture the aspirations of the people and countries of the region.

Political, social and economic transitions since 2010 as well as a number of current crises have had significant impact on developmental efforts in the region, including, in some cases, halting or reversing progress towards achieving the MDGs. Given these emerging challenges, it is necessary that we support Member States to adapt their policies to the new realities and guide their efforts to harness opportunities such as the youth bulge and the demographic dividend.

Going forward, ESCWA plans to continue to support countries with measuring progress on population issues relating to sustainable development and the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. We will continue supporting national population councils and statistics agencies to ensure rigorous monitoring, availability of data and implementation of evidence-based policies for the achievement of the new goals.

Mme Chair, only if future development efforts integrate population issues will states be able to reap the benefits of the processes lying ahead and improve quality of life for their populations. As such, ESCWA advocates for integrating population dimensions across the three pillars of sustainable development, for ensuring that future indicators are population sensitive, for adequate funding to support work on population issues, and finally, for development efforts that include all and leave no one behind.

Mme Chair, Thank you.