

Commission on Population and Development

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Statement

on behalf of the European Union

by

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Head of Delegation

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Madame/Mister Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to make this statement to the Commission on Population and Development on behalf of the member countries of the European Union. We believe that the theme of this session on the contributions of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, could not be more relevant or timely.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the historic International Conference on Population and Development, which was held in Cairo in 1994. Fifteen years ago, delegates shifted the population debate away from a top down approach focused on human numbers to a bottom up approach focused on human rights and needs.

The European Union affirms our strong support for and commitment to the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action, as well as the key actions for the further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action agreed at ICPD+5, and the Copenhagen Declaration and Action Programme; and also emphasises that gender equality cannot be achieved without guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and reaffirm that expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and health services are essential for achieving the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals

It was at the Cairo Conference where delegates confirmed reproductive rights and first proclaimed the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health, which cuts to the core of human existence, progress and survival. The members of the European Union hold the firm belief that the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals will not be achieved unless these rights are vigorously promoted and protected. As we gather here today a decade and a half later, we acknowledge that while progress has been made, these rights remain unfulfilled for far too many women, men and young people, with devastating and far-reaching consequences.

Today poor sexual and reproductive health is a leading killer of girls aged 15 to 19 in the developing world. Each year, lack of investment in this critical area leads to 80 million unwanted pregnancies which culminate in 50 million induced abortions, including approximately 20 million unsafe and illegal abortions often with devastating consequences for the woman. This is a major public health concern. Each year, 340 million people are newly infected with sexually transmitted infections and over 2 million people die from AIDS. And each year, more than half a million women die during pregnancy and childbirth even though we know the interventions that can save lives. The fact that these numbers have not declined during the last decades can only be seen as a major failure. In the years remaining till 2015 governments must show significant political and financial commitment directed to save women's lives.

To make motherhood safe and achieve MDG5 to improve maternal health, every woman needs three critical reproductive health services: family planning, skilled attendance at birth and emergency obstetric care if complications arise. If these services were guaranteed through strengthened health systems, a woman would not die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth each and every minute. If we are to address these needless deaths Governments must show significant political and financial commitment directed to save women's lives. These actions would also serve to improve maternal and child health and reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

The largest generation of adolescents ever in history is now entering sexual and reproductive life and their access to sexual and reproductive health information, education, services and commodities, including male and female condoms, is essential in achieving the goals as set out in Cairo 15 years ago, as well as the fight against HIV/AIDS. The lack of access to such information and services needs to be urgently addressed. This is all the more important when we consider that poor sexual and reproductive health threatens human development, economic growth and social coherence. Motherhood at a very young age entails a risk of maternal death that is greater than average and the children of young mothers have higher levels of morbidity and mortality.

Madame/Mister Chairperson, education is a key factor in sustainable development. The reduction of fertility, morbidity and mortality rates, the empowerment of women, improvement of the quality of

the working population and the promotion of genuine democracy can all be largely assisted by progress in education. In other words, universal access to education, recommended in the ICPD Programme of Action, is fundamental to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

In the countdown to 2015, with only five years remaining, the European Union will accelerate action to guarantee universal access to reproductive health and ensure reproductive health commodity security. We will continue to work closely together with UNFPA, governments, civil society and other partners to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as women's empowerment and gender equality with the aim to achieve the goals set out at relevant international conferences, including the ICPD.

Given the decline in international assistance for family planning, the European Union will do its utmost to increase access to family planning. Meeting the needs of some 200 million women who want to plan and space their births but have no access to contraceptives is a poverty reduction strategy. The target of universal access to reproductive health under MDG5 to improve maternal health paves the way for faster progress.

Today the European Union calls for increased attention to strengthening assistance to developing countries to ensure implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. The poorest countries and countries in situation of fragility should not be the victims of the current economic crisis, which must not undermine the implementation of commitments in support of the Monterrey consensus and the achievement of the MDGs.

The European Union welcomes the updated ICPD cost estimates that have been presented to the Commission. We also welcome the new population projections of the United Nations Population Division and recognize that demographic trends need to be examined and addressed in line with goals and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action, especially sexual and reproductive health, family planning and gender equality key actions.

As we work together with development partners to achieve development goals, we note that formulating appropriate policy and programme, monitoring performance and reporting on progress depends on the regular availability of quality data, including data disaggregated by age, sex and income and geographical location. The 2010 census round provides an opportunity to make greater progress in this area.

Given today's food and financial crises and climate change, the visionary and holistic Cairo agenda—with its focus on population, poverty, health care, education, gender, HIV/AIDS, and the environment and advancing the health and rights of women and men, remains more relevant than ever. Its recommendations point the way towards much needed balance, equity and renewal. It is common knowledge that adequate investments in women, young and people and reproductive health reap tremendous rewards for society and all of humanity.

Thank you for your attention.