

**Statement to the Commission on Population and Development
Acting as Preparatory Committee for the Special Session
of the General Assembly**

As written



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**PREPARATORY COMMITTEE OF THE SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE
REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION**

Statement

by

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As we look back on five years of implementing the ICPD Programme of Action, there has been much progress in policy and programme design, in legislative and/or institutional changes and the increased partnership and collaboration among the governments, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society. But many challenges remain and are not to be underestimated.

The ICPD affirms the application of universally **recognised** human rights **standards** to all aspects of human development. In its follow-up to the ICPD, as endorsed by the Executive Board in 1995 and reviewed in June 1998, UNICEF focuses on girls' education, gender equality and equity, primary health care and child survival, prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, and reduction of **maternal** mortality. UNICEF **programmes** in these areas are implemented through a rights-based approach, and in this regard, it is encouraging to **note that** all **except** two countries in the world have ratified the CRC and 162 countries have ratified the CEDAW, making them the most ratified human rights instruments. A rights-based approach to programming implies placing the responsibility for upholding and fulfilling rights where it belongs. It also calls attention to wider issues of social change, development policy, and legislation; and initiates a process whereby children and adolescents, within the context of their evolving capacities, and women, must participate in the processes and decisions that concern them and affect their lives. This will result, we believe, in real and lasting change.

For UNICEF, expansion of girls' education is key to fulfilling the rights of girls and women. Education provides girls with increased opportunities to make independent life choices. It enables girls to defend, claim and realise rights as adults and to delay marriage and childbearing. We believe that as a critical pathway to a better life and equality for women and girls, it will enable them to more actively participate in decision-making at home, the community and their nation and ultimately lead to improved outcomes for children.

130 million children **are** denied their rights to education; almost two thirds of them are girls (73 million). Nearly a billion (a sixth of the world's population) are illiterate - the majority of them women. In order to remove the barriers that preclude girls and women **from realising** their rights to equality, there is a need to promote life skills development and **create** a school environment that **encourages** girls' participation in learning, responds to their needs, **sensitises** boys to respect and support their rights, and supports them in building self-esteem and confidence. There is also a need to **interact** with **and** support families in changing their attitudes and **behaviours** towards girls in the home and in the **community**.

From a rights perspective, **maternal** mortality **can be seen**, as the **non-fulfilment of girls' and women's right** to information, **counselling** and health care. Experience shows that to **reduce maternal mortality and** improve achievements in women's **reproductive health**, expanded **approaches** are **necessary** - **this** we **undertake in collaboration** with other UN **agencies**, especially **WHO and UNFPA**. Women-friendly **health services** need to be complemented with actions to address social causes and **determinants, e.g. customary attitudes and practices that do not value women, discrimination against girls within the family, and sensitisation of males.**

In working with young people, UNICEF is supporting the ICPD objectives of promoting the health, well being and potential of the world's future human resources. Young people between the ages of 10 and 24 years constitute 30 percent of the **world's** population. Adolescence is a period of the life cycle that has great potential for **influencing** values and behaviours, for example, gender equality, non-violence and nondiscrimination. It is also the period when children are most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, drugs and violence. The CRC outlines the rights of children to information and opportunities to develop life skills; to access education, health and other services (e.g. recreation and criminal justice); and to have a safe and supportive environment and opportunities to participate in civil society. Children's ability to realise these rights has a clear influence on their decisions and on the quality of their lives. Changing attitudes of teachers and parents to life-skills education is a challenge; but with careful planning, community-based, participatory methodologies can make them active participants in adolescent education **programmes**.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has emerged as a major challenge that seriously threatens recent ICPD achievements and if unchecked, will have a catastrophic impact on past gains in women's health and development. It is estimated that half of all new infections are to young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years. The number of children orphaned by AIDS, currently 8 million, is expected to increase to 40 million by Year 2010. In Southern and Eastern Africa, there is evidence that women disproportionately share the burden of HIV/AIDS infection. We know that a significant number of **affected** mothers who **breastfeed** their children must also address the fear of mother-child transmission of the virus. Not only are they ill; but they also must face the **fact** that they are passing along this illness to their children. There is a need to review the objectives and actions set out in Cairo, and to articulate quantifiable, time-bound goals and targets that are agreed to (with possible adaptations) by countries and regions, to arrest the spread of HIV/AIDS. Reducing mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS is a priority for UNICEF -- both for the protection of **infants** and to meet the needs of HIV positive mothers. **In close collaboration with UNAIDS, UNICEF actively supports** information dissemination to young people on responsible sexual **behaviour** and on voluntary and confidential testing for HIV/AIDS prevention. This includes supporting countries in implementing school-based education, peer education, and **special youth health programmes**. **In all of these activities and programmes**, attention must be given to gender concerns and issues of gender equity.

Adequate investment in social services and women's empowerment are central requirements for poverty **reduction** and **human-centred** development; and are **also** instrumental in breaking barriers and **overcoming resistance to tackling gender equity and equality issues**. **A comparative study of ten developing countries, commissioned by UNICEF, correlated investment in basic education -- especially that of girls -- to the achievement of social progress very early in the development process, even when incomes are very low. The study also found that girls' education has led to a breakthrough in infant mortality reduction. The implications are clear- it can be done elsewhere.**

The recent inter-governmental meeting in Hanoi on the implementation of the 20/20 Initiative has highlighted the importance of this partnership and placed renewed emphasis on the equity and efficiency dimensions of directing public spending and official development assistance to basic social services. Here we have a real opportunity to provide more resources for this important goal.

All of the foregoing suggest the need to strengthen existing and build new partnerships if we are to realise success and triumph over the challenges that lie ahead. As highlighted by the report on the Hague Forum, both partnerships with civil society organisations and promotion of young people's participation in programming – in all phases: assessment, analysis and action – have been critical to achievements at the national level. At the same time, work with government structures has become increasingly **decentralised** and has provided new opportunities for partnerships with district and municipal levels of administration.

As we all know, there is much to be done and working together, we can continue the momentum. Concerted action and partnership are needed to deal with the lack of full and consistent political commitment to improving the health and welfare of women and girls; institutional and societal resistance to addressing issues of gender a&; inadequate resources to address the range of issues and problems facing women and girls; and inadequate data on women and girls, coupled with a lack of sufficient indicators to monitor and assess women's status, survival and development outcomes.

Finally, I take this opportunity to commend UNFPA for leading the process of reviewing and appraising the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and pledge UNICEF's continued commitment to accomplishing the goals and objectives agreed to at Cairo.