

Beyond Cairo: Time to Recommit to Women's Rights and Population for the SDGs

Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to contribute to the 57th session. My name is Florence Blondel, representing [Population Matters](#), [Population Connection](#), and [Population Media Center](#). We're all NGOs with ECOSOC status, focused on achieving sustainable development through empowering ethical and practical population solutions for the benefit of people and planet.

The 1994 Cairo Programme of Action was clear on the benefits of slowing population growth and the urgent need to empower all women and girls, yet the world has failed them. Almost half of partnered women in low- and mid-income countries still have no decision-making power over their own bodies, while one-in-five girls today is married before she turns 18, gender-based violence still affects one-in-three women globally, and 257 million women have an unmet need for modern contraception.

While we've seen important progress in reducing the proportion of women affected by some of these injustices, in many cases, the total number of affected women is still growing due to population growth outstripping development efforts.

International funding for reproductive health and rights sadly falls far short of what is needed to fulfil the basic rights of all women and girls. This is a tragedy, both because it is a moral failing and because investing in women and girls is key to advancing all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

As noted in the Report of the Secretary-General, "the continuing high levels of fertility that drive rapid population growth in many low- and lower-middle-income countries are both a cause and a symptom of slow progress in development." Drawing the links between population, health, environment, and poverty is key to demonstrating the unmatched power of women's empowerment.

However, we've seen misguided attempts at censoring population concern within some circles. Intentionally obscuring the enormous returns on investment generated by funding voluntary family planning and women's empowerment in terms of health, socioeconomic, and environmental benefits makes it much harder to close the funding gap.

As noted by Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro, former CEO of the Global Fund for Women,

"When we leave the P out of the ICPD, we cannot achieve the goals of the ICPD..."

Our three organizations would like to see a recommitment to the Programme of Action and Agenda 2030 that embraces the critical linkages between population and the SDGs, and that emphasizes the crucial importance of investing in women and girls.

To be concerned about population is to be concerned about people, their needs, their rights, and those of future generations. *We must end the siloing of environment and reproductive health and rights: the two are inextricably linked and synergistic.*

We stand ready to collaborate with the UN and other stakeholders to ensure the Programme of Action remains a vital framework for achieving sustainable development in a world of 8 billion plus people.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to a continued dialogue on these critical issues.

