

**Statement by
H.E. Ms. Zahra Ershadi
Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative
of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations
Before the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on Population and Development**

**Agenda Item 3: General Debate
10-14 April 2023, New York**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Please check against delivery

Madam Chair.

Please allow me to express my gratitude to you and the Secretariat for the commendable efforts in convening this important meeting.

Madam Chair.

The role of education and a healthy life is undeniable and holds a significant impact on the overall progress of society.

With this in mind, the Islamic Republic of Iran has taken concrete steps to formulate and implement population policies and measures as part of our National Development Plan to enhance the sustainable development goals in education and health-care services.

In this regard, we have made remarkable progress in achieving sustainable development goals in terms of education, particularly, in the education and empowerment of women and girls. Before the Islamic Revolution, the literacy rate of women stood at 35.3%. By 2022, this rate increased to 95%. In addition, in 2022, the adult literacy rate in Iran, for ages 15 and above, was estimated at 97%. The gender gap in education at both the primary and secondary levels in my country has

been eradicated completely. The health-care coverage of the population has reached more than 95%, which sets a high record in this development goal.

Madam Chair.

The Islamic Republic of Iran currently hosts millions of refugees, particularly Afghan refugees, as well as people of varying migration statuses, making Iran one of the largest refugee-hosting countries. Despite receiving limited support from the international community while facing inhumane unilateral sanctions, Iran has continued to provide essential services to Afghans living in the country for more than four decades. In addition, Iran provides free education and training to all Afghan students, embracing more than 670,000 (six hundred and seventy thousand) Afghan students. This includes 3,700 (three thousand and seven hundred) students with special education and mental disabilities and over 33,000 (thirty-three thousand) students enrolled in Iranian universities.

Everyone has the right to access education and that should be guaranteed for all people in their respective States. The recent ban restrictions imposed on Afghan women and girls denying them access to education as well as against UN women staff, are deeply concerning and must be reversed. Despite promises made by the de-facto authorities, they have yet to fulfill their obligations.

Madam Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues.

Unilateral Coercive Measures continue to be one of the pressing challenges that hinder the efforts of developing countries in achieving sustainable development and realizing their relevant commitments. These measures, which are a flagrant

violation of the fundamental principles of international law and the principles set forth within the Charter of the United Nations, continue to inflict immeasurable and egregious harm upon the affected populations, in particular, women and children including in the field of education. As reflected in the relevant documents of the United Nations, such measures, among others, prevent the implementation of joint academic research and exchange programmes, the contribution of scholars to foreign scientific journals, and access to online academic databases.

These unlawful measures which systematically and disproportionately target populations and constitute severe discrimination on the grounds of nationality, violate human rights of innocent people, in particular women and children, *inter alia*, their right to education, the right to benefit from academic research and academic freedom as well as the right to development. In the light of the foregoing, we strongly condemn the Unilateral Coercive Measures and, emphasizing that states shall desist and refrain from promulgating and applying such inhumane and unlawful measures, we highlight that this Commission should *indeed* address the negative impacts of Unilateral Coercive Measures on population, education, and development.

Madam Chair.

At the end, stressing the importance of respecting rights of parents to choose the type of education for their children, we would like to reaffirm the sovereign right and prerogatives of each country in formulating, adopting and implementing its population, education and development policies in conformity with their national laws and in consistency with cultural and social contexts.

I thank you.