

CPD56 ORAL STATEMENT BY POPULATION MATTERS

My name is Florence Blondel and I represent Population Matters, a UK-based international charity campaigning to achieve sustainable human population and consumption, to protect nature and improve people's lives. Population Matters is committed to the principles of the ICPD programme of action, to choice, human rights and global justice.

We welcome the recognition of the role of education in equipping people to understand environmental issues and take action, and in increasing capacity for adaptation and resilience especially in those communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. I am joined here in New York by Population Matters Choice Ambassador, Nyombi Morris, who is a youth climate activist from Uganda. Nyombi can attest to the vital importance of education, family planning and gender equality in the fight for climate justice.

It is also important that environmental education informs students of all the factors. Overconsumption in the Global North is the key driver of our global environmental crisis, but strong evidence from, among others, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, also shows the role of population growth in contributing to environmental problems.

Separately, education plays a key role in resisting a rising pronatal agenda that poses a growing threat to reproductive rights and gender equality. Low fertility is an increasing preoccupation of politicians across the world, and we are already seeing those concerns manifesting as drastic restrictions on reproductive freedom, such as in Iran. We are also seeing concerns about low birth rate used to justify restrictions on abortion and other family planning services in China and Eastern Europe, and in political rhetoric which stigmatises women who choose smaller families and people from LGBTQI communities.

Political concern about low fertility is also motivated by perceived nationalistic and ethnic interests which are often related to anti-gender, racist and anti-migrant agendas, such as the so-called "Great Replacement Theory", which is endorsed and promoted by politicians in Europe and the US. Education must also play a role in equipping people to understand and resist these toxic narratives.

Last, demographic challenges resulting from ageing are real, but education plays a key role in increasing labour force participation, including in particular by women, and by equipping older people for more economically productive and satisfying opportunities in later life. As the Secretary General's report notes, lifelong learning is vital.