



RESPONSE OF THE HOLY SEE TO QUESTIONS ON THE FUTURE ROLE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Holy See is grateful to the Bureau of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) for the opportunity to respond to the questions included in the note circulated by the Chair of the Commission to Permanent Representatives and Permanent Observers to the United Nations (UN) in his letter dated 10 July 2020.

General comments

1. As a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the CPD and its organization, as well as any changes to these, must respect and adhere to the *Rules of Procedure of the Functional Commissions of the Economic and Social Council*.
2. In ECOSOC resolution 2016/25 of 27 July 2016 the Council decided, “that the Commission may, at the request of Member States, further review its methods of work in view of the follow up and review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The reflection process should not be an end in and of itself, but be guided by the very purpose of ensuring the full implementation of its mandated tasks, which include the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA) of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, the process must be coordinated with future negotiations on the resolution on methods of work.
3. The format of this reflection process, which “is expected to continue under the aegis of the next Bureau and to feed into the consideration of this issue at the Commission’s fifty-fourth session in 2021”,¹ must be consensus-based, intergovernmental, open, transparent and inclusive. It should not be limited by pre-determined deadlines, outcomes or conclusions.

¹ CPD Chair letter, 10 July 2020.

4. Should the reflection process bring forth proposals on which consensus could emerge, the decisions on such proposals must be adopted through a pre-determined intergovernmental process. The Commission and the reflection process should not be held up by proposals that are not required to ensure or facilitate the implementation of the Commission's mandate or changes that cannot be adopted by consensus.

5. Only a reflection that meets the abovementioned requirements will ensure that its outcomes can be effectively implemented and contribute to the role and organization of the CPD as a functional commission of the ECOSOC. It will be important that future meetings of the reflection process are announced well in advance, that its documentation circulated early to allow consultation with Capitals and that discussions allow for meaningful exchanges among delegations.

6. The mandate of the Commission includes issues that belong also to the mandates of other intergovernmental UN bodies, *inter alia* the Second Committee of the General Assembly and the ECOSOC High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development. Any reflection of the CPD's role and organization must carefully avoid duplication with these other entities by remaining keenly focused on the implementation of its specific mandate. Further and more detailed considerations are needed on the concrete functionality of the "three-tiered intergovernmental mechanism".²

Organizational aspects/Implementation of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development

7. ECOSOC resolution 1995/55 of 28 July 1995 and ECOSOC resolution 2016/25 of 27 July 2016 have in a comprehensive manner identified the mandate of the Commission. Ensuring that it faithfully implements the complete mandate must be given highest priority.

8. A reductive or ever-changing approach to the mandate is counter-productive. It makes light of the carefully negotiated balance found in the PoA of the ICPD, on which further efforts are needed as it has not been implemented in its totality. It also, thereby, runs the risk of politicizing the work of both the Commission and the ECOSOC to their individual and common detriment. The comprehensive nature of the PoA, promoting concerted international action on population and development

² General Assembly resolution 49/128 of 19 December 1994.

issues (notably in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), must be reflected in the work of the Commission.

9. Changes to the multi-year programme or the adoption of a cycle of review should be advanced if these changes guarantee that the complete mandate of the Commission is considered and carried out through the CPD sessions. The same applies to any changes to the duration of the sessions. Overloading the session with panels, discussions or other events that have little or no reference to the Commission's focus on development is unhelpful.

10. The intergovernmental nature of the CPD must be respected. This necessitates also the correct understanding of the auxiliary and “complementary roles of the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat and the United Nations Population Fund, within their existing mandates, in supporting the efficient work of the Commission”.³

Substantive dimensions/Population and development issues and trends

11. The substantive dimensions of the Commission's work must be grounded in a comprehensive and textual reading of the PoA. This to recognize that the “ICPD was an important milestone in the world's understanding of the interrelationship between population and development, indeed considering the linkage between these two for the first time. All forms of coercion in the implementation of population policies were rejected. The family, based on marriage, was recognized as the fundamental unit of society, and as entitled to comprehensive support and protection. Strong impetus was given to the improvement of the status of women throughout the world, particularly with regard to their health, and their full and equal participation in development. The expanding phenomenon of migration was considered along with its impact on development”.⁴

12. Without a grounding in its mandate and the text of the PoA, “emerging issues” or “review themes” would further fragment the work of the Commission and unnecessarily prolong its discussions. Also, considering its global nature, fixing specific “emerging issues” or “challenges” to implementation would be difficult as the differences between countries and regions are great. The purpose of regional

³ ECOSOC resolution 2016/25 of 27 July 2016.

⁴ Statement of the Holy See at the Fifty-Second Session of the Commission on Population and Development (2019).

reviews is to consider specific realities within a geographic group of countries, not those of the world as a whole or set priorities for the Commission.

13. Multi-stakeholder and expert panels can provide added value and inform the work of the Commission on recent data, trends and development. For this to occur, they need to be carefully planned, represent a true spectrum of opinions, and its panelists being drawn from individuals that are familiar with the Commission and its mandate. The lack of such characteristics makes these panels equivalent to side-events. The same comments apply to civil society participation.

Outcome/Methods of work (organizational aspects, substantive elements, outcome)

14. The lack of a consensual outcome during several recent sessions of the Commission requires attention. The Commission should take stock of the concrete reasons why consensus was not reached. This includes a need to honestly pin-point the arguments that cause the impasse in the texts under negotiation.

15. Recognizing serious complications in advancing consensus and moving at once to procedural changes or giving up on the idea of reaching consensus would be harmful to the Commission's future and is not acceptable. Consensus must be our goal, not just to have an outcome document, but to send a clear and united signal that the Commission and all States are serious about ensuring "real-life", "on-the-ground" efforts to promote integral development for every man, woman and child.