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Agenda item 3: Actions in follow-up to the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development

**Statement by HE Mr Andrew Goledzinowski
Deputy Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

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Mr Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his reports to the Commission on Population and Development, and to acknowledge the concerted efforts of staff within UNFPA and DESA to provide us with up-to-date information and analysis on the theme of this year's Commission, "Health, morbidity, mortality and development".

All Member States need to maintain our commitment to implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and accelerating progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In particular, we must recognise the importance of the health-related goals, achieving universal primary education, and promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Against this background, Australia has committed to substantially increase its funding for development assistance, including for health, through to 2015. We are working with a range of international and domestic partners to help countries develop and implement better policies and improve health systems and services. We are committed to supporting country-led national health policies in keeping with the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action.

Mr Chairman,

We should all be very concerned about the poor progress on maternal, newborn and child health and the inadequate levels of financing to reach MDGs 4 and 5, particularly in Asia and Africa.

It is unacceptable that over half a million women die annually from pregnancy related conditions, with most of these deaths occurring in developing countries. More than 200 million women lack access to modern contraception and this contributes to about 20 million unsafe abortions each year. Violence against women is also a significant cause of injury and ill-health among women all over the world. Tragically, about four million newborn babies die every year. The health of the mother and the baby are intrinsically linked during pregnancy and immediately after birth, and most of these deaths could be prevented or avoided through proven, cost-effective actions. In the Asia-Pacific region, maternal deaths are especially high in Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste.

This is why we have decided to focus our support for MDGs 4 and 5 on providing equitable access to maternal and reproductive health services, and on reaching the poor and vulnerable. Strengthening health systems to effectively and efficiently deliver health services is the cornerstone of our approach to health development, an approach that is recognised internationally as the most effective way to achieve sustainable improvements in health outcomes.

The poor health outcomes of women in developing countries are often a reflection of gender inequality. In the absence of a functioning health system and improvements in the empowerment and education of women, significant reductions in maternal and newborn deaths will not be achieved. Yet investments in maternal and newborn health and women's empowerment and education can have significant returns in development gains, because they contribute to reducing poverty and improving national productivity and economic development. Because of this, Australia and our development partners are supporting several countries in the Asia-Pacific region to develop investment cases for achieving MDGs 4 and 5. These investment cases will identify bottlenecks, estimate the costs of overcoming these bottlenecks, and highlight ways forward.

The UN family is a key player in these endeavours and we have a strong partnership with UNFPA to assist countries to meet their MDG and ICPD commitments. We also encourage and support the H4 group – UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and the World Bank – to continue to collaborate and work closer together to further this agenda.

Thank you