

**Statement by the United States at the
UN Commission on Population and Development**

Delivered by:

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April 12, 2011**

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you and the bureau for your efforts to prepare us for the work of this year's Commission.

Much has changed since 1994 when 179 nations gathered in Cairo and adopted by consensus the ICPD Program of Action. Then the world's population stood at 5.6 billion. Within the coming year, it will reach 7 billion. The issues we will address under this year's theme — fertility, reproductive health, and development — are important for all of us and for generations to come.

Allow me to reflect for a moment on those new generations. In Cairo, we recognized the needs and human rights of young people. In 1994, about 2.3 billion people were under the age of 19. Today, nearly 2.5 billion are this age, an increase of 200 million youth, who now represent one third of the world's population. Our deliberations this week – and how we act on them – need to address the real-life circumstances of youth. Progress must be made in providing them the tools to shape their own future, including the comprehensive information, sexuality education, and health services they need and that teaches them about their rights and responsibilities to deal positively with their sexual and reproductive health and enjoy healthy, productive lives.

The ICPD Program of Action and international agreements since then, including the 2009 resolution adopted by this Commission, recognize that for women and adolescents to realize their full potential, they must be able to control their own fertility and achieve the highest attainable standard of sexual and reproductive health. These agreements further recognize the right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children.

Although we all know these rights have not yet been fully realized, we see major opportunities for progress. In particular, the U.S. welcomes the Secretary General's Global Strategy on Women's and Children's Health, which encourages investments in women and girls to meet the health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – particularly MDGs 4 and 5 where progress is far off track. This strategy promotes the package of integrated services defined in Cairo and presents a unique opportunity to keep alive a global consensus to accelerate action to reduce the alarmingly high rates of maternal and child mortality and to ensure universal access to reproductive health.

Launched last fall, the Secretary General's strategy has already garnered significant financial support. Nearly 30 countries with the highest burden of maternal deaths have made commitments to prioritize the necessary investments, especially the integration of reproductive health services. My government's own commitment – the Global Health Initiative – aims to provide a package of integrated health services based on strong health systems that emphasize country ownership. Like the ICPD Program of Action, this initiative focuses on women, girls, and gender equality to fight disease and promote health worldwide. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a cornerstone of the

Global Health Initiative, is also working to improve the reproductive health of women, as part of wide efforts to foster comprehensive HIV responses – especially prevention – that more effectively meet the needs of women and girls.

President Obama underscored our deep commitment to eradicating extreme poverty at the MDG Summit last September. Access to reproductive health services, including family planning, is a central element of the United States' development work. The President and Secretary Clinton recognize that the cycle of poverty can only be broken by empowering women and that improving women's health, particularly their access to comprehensive reproductive health care, is essential. We further recognize that the health of women is closely linked to the health of their own children and the strength of future generations. Investing in women's health is therefore key to the social and economic development of communities and nations.

Secretary Clinton has said, "Saving the lives of women and children requires a range of care, from improving nutrition to training birth attendants who can help women give birth safely. It also requires increased access to family planning. Family planning represents one of the most cost-effective public health interventions available in the world today. It prevents both maternal and child deaths by helping women space their births and bear their children during their healthiest years. And it reduces the deaths of women from unsafe abortion." Currently there are more than 200 million married women, and uncounted millions of others, worldwide whose need for modern methods of contraception are not being met. Fulfilling this unmet need for family planning could avert almost 25 million abortions and prevent 640,000 newborn deaths.

The Obama administration is strongly committed to achieving reproductive health and protecting human rights, both domestically and around the world. Access to reproductive health services, including family planning, is a central element of the United States government's development work. So, too, are our broad and active partnerships with national governments, international organizations, civil society and philanthropic organizations, and those committed to achieving the ICPD and Millennium Development Goals. We particularly recognize the vital roles of UNFPA and UN Women, whose global leadership and collaboration with countries is critical to achieving these goals. We especially look forward to working in concert with new Executive Directors, Dr. Osotimehin and Ms. Bachelet.

Although we have made great progress in many areas since 1994, much remains to be done. We applaud the renewed commitment of countries everywhere, including the French government, which has recently pledged increased funding for West Africa where maternal mortality is among the highest and modern contraceptive use among the lowest in the world. We will continue working closely with our counterparts worldwide — not only in the ministries of health, but with foreign ministers, defense ministers, finance ministers, prime ministers and presidents — to achieve our shared commitments to reproductive health and gender equality.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we look forward to a productive discussion with delegations on the vital links between fertility, reproductive health and social and economic development. Together we can make strong progress toward a healthier, more equitable, and ultimately, more prosperous world in which all our nations will thrive in the 21st century. Thank you.