



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 www.AustraliaUN.org

48th Commission on Population and Development
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Australian Statement: Integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post 2015 development agenda (Agenda item 4)

**Statement by HE Gillian Bird
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

Thank you Madam Chair,

The Secretary General's report on integrating population issues into sustainable development is a reminder not only of the enduring relevance of the International Conference on Population and Development and its programme of action, but also of the critical importance of putting people at the centre of the commitments we will make as part of the post-2015 development agenda.

Madam Chair,

Australia believes very strongly that gender equality must be at the heart of efforts to achieve a just and sustainable world, free from poverty.

The promotion of women and girls' empowerment and human rights, and ensuring their meaningful participation in decisions that affect them, are critical to breaking the cycle of

gender inequality and discrimination, violence and poverty and achieving sustainable development and economic growth.

Core to women's and girls' empowerment is their control over their own bodies. This includes preventing and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, and ending harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and early, child and forced marriage. It also means ensuring that all people are able to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and have access to comprehensive sexuality education and responsive, respectful, quality health care and services.

And we cannot afford to think of gender equality as a luxury for times of stability and calm. The Secretary-General's report speaks to the increasing unmet demand for contraception in Ebola-affected countries, where the Ebola virus has crippled health systems. The report speaks of the nearly 115,000 Syrian children born as refugees. These are just two examples of why gender equality and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights are always relevant.

We must seek to promote gender equality and women and girls human rights in situations of conflict and calamity and for displaced populations and refugees. In this respect, we commend UNFPA's important work in providing access to sexual and reproductive health services, maternal health care and psycho-sexual support in all settings, including in humanitarian settings. All of us, donors, affected governments and responders must recognise that supporting gender equality and sexual and reproductive health in disasters is a life-saving intervention on par with providing food, water and shelter.

Madam chair,

As well as considering sexual and reproductive health and rights in all circumstances, we must also consider these issues for all people, particularly for young people, and especially girls. Our programmes and policies must be responsive to the needs of young people and adolescents. We know that this age group is more vulnerable to HIV, and that in developing countries, one of the leading causes of death for girls aged between 15 and 19 is complications from pregnancy – we know we must do much better.

Young people will be the drivers of development for the next 50 years and we need to invest in them and support them to reach their full potential.

Madam chair,

I cannot speak today without noting that yesterday marked one year since hundreds of girls were kidnapped from their school in Nigeria by Boko Haram. 219 girls are still missing. Children and young people are too often the victims, and schools too often the target of extremism and violence. We cannot hope to deliver on our ambitions for a world free from poverty and inequality if we cannot protect children from this scourge, and if we cannot protect education from extremism and violence – we must do better.

Madam Chair,

We cannot do what we have always done and hope that somehow, now, current practices and current thinking will deliver the change we need to see. The Australian Government is thinking differently about how we contribute to a world with equality of opportunity, and we know that we need to be more innovative and to find new solutions.

The young people I have just referred to live in a different world, enhanced by technology, and we need ways forward which work in their world.

The Secretary-General's report speaks to the need for better health data to support the policies and action that improve people's lives, and this is one area where Australia is innovating.

The Australian Government is partnering with Bloomberg Philanthropies to close the global gap in health data. This is the first time Bloomberg Philanthropies has partnered with a national government.

Over the next four years our Data for Health partnership will help low and middle income countries use new and mobile technologies to gather vital health data on births, deaths and risk factors. This will ensure that all people are counted, and that moves to address global health problems are targeted to where they are most needed.

Madam chair,

Australia remains committed to the ICPD Programme of Action and actions for its further implementation. We also reaffirm our support for the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development.

When we agree the post-2015 development agenda, we will set ourselves an ambitious framework for the next 15 years. These ambitions must respond to population considerations and the opportunities and challenges that changing demographics will bring. But most of all these ambitions must be based on human rights, dignity and equality.