

Madam Chair

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Commission on Population and Development. Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by Latvia on behalf of the European Union.

2015 is a pivotal year for international development, and Ireland is honoured to be playing a leading role in shaping a new global framework to follow on from the Millennium Development Goals. Ireland has been a leading voice on the need for continued progress on MDG 3 on gender equality, and MDG 5 on maternal mortality. As we look towards the new development agenda, we are reminded that realising the vision of the MDGs is not only essential if we are to eliminate maternal and child mortality, but also essential for other important goals such as health, education, gender equality and women's empowerment.

### **Health**

Access to quality maternal and reproductive healthcare, supporting safe motherhood and allowing women to control their fertility, is central to any healthy society. Providing women and girls with sexual and reproductive choice enables them to break free from cycles of poverty and disadvantage. It affords them the opportunity to freely and responsibly decide on matters related to their sexuality free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

Ireland's new Policy on International Development reaffirms our commitment to supporting efforts that reduce maternal and infant mortality, and to promoting universal access to reproductive healthcare, including ante-natal care and family planning services, consistent with the Cairo Programme of Action. Of Irish Aid's annual budget, 20% is invested in global health and HIV programmes.

We also support UN agencies and global initiatives. Most recently in Sierra Leone where we supported UNFPA to undertake a rapid assessment of the impact of Ebola on reproductive health services. This will inform strategies to minimise the very serious secondary impacts of Ebola.

### **Youth**

When we think specifically of youth, we are reminded of the frightening statistic that AIDS is now the leading cause of death among adolescents aged 10–19 in Africa. It is also the second most common cause of death among adolescents globally.

Ireland has consistently allocated over €100 million euro annually from our aid budget to combating HIV and AIDS and other communicable diseases globally. We have also worked to promote behavioural change and to provide access to sexual and reproductive health services to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. Age appropriate comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services are essential to reducing mortality from the virus.

As highlighted in the most recent *State of the World's Population Report*, unless we take account of the particular vulnerabilities, needs and rights of youth in the post-2015 agenda, we will miss the key demographic cohort which has the potential and power to ensure a more sustainable world for all.

### **Girls' Education**

Statistically, we know that girls who are educated longer, are more likely to marry later and to delay child bearing. This results in improved health outcomes for both mother and child, not to mention improved life opportunities. This is critical in countries where the leading cause of death for girls between 15 and 19 is related to pregnancy and childbirth.

It remains the case that 50% of girls in the poorest countries do not attend secondary school. Ireland is therefore working closely with civil society organisations and governments to overcome barriers to girls' continued education. We are convinced that ensuring quality secondary education for girls, and comprehensive sexuality education for all, are central to women's empowerment; to realising sexual and reproductive health rights; and to enhancing the lives of families everywhere.

### **Gender**

We firmly believe that tackling gender inequality and gender based violence is critical to addressing unequal outcomes for women and girls worldwide. By protecting and promoting sexual and reproductive rights, we not only enable women to access reproductive health services, but also provide a platform for women to negotiate their treatment in society throughout their life.

Irish Aid, in partnership with groups such as the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence, is strongly promoting the empowerment of women and the elimination of violence against women and girls. This is a central component of Ireland's *Second National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security* which our Minister for Foreign Affairs launched earlier this year. Ireland is also working to end harmful practices including child, early and forced marriage and has consistently supported the UNICEF/UNFPA Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation since its inception in 2008.

In conclusion Madam Chair, allow me to reiterate Ireland's continued strong support to fully realising the objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action. We look forward to working constructively with other member states to ensuring that the outcome from our deliberations this week contributes to the strongest possible sustainable development framework, particularly for the most vulnerable.

Thank you for your kind attention.