

**South Africa's Statement to the 48th Session of the UN
Commission on Population and Development**

**Presented
by**

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**"Realising the future we want" Integrating population issues
into sustainable development, including in the post-2015
development agenda**

Chairperson and distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I have the honour to address the 49th Session of the Commission on Population and Development on behalf of the Republic of South Africa. I would also like to congratulate the newly elected Members of the Bureau and to assure you of our continued support during your tenure.

Chairperson, we consider this session, which marks the 21st anniversary of the adoption of the historic Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) as an important opportunity for Member States to consolidate progress made over the past years and to accelerate action on key areas as well as provide impetus to tackle emerging issues.

The ICPD Programme of Action was and remains one of the most important platforms in the global work on population and development. The South African delegation acknowledges the tremendous progress that has been made towards the realisation of some of the goals and objectives of the ICPD-PoA as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Twenty years later, we acknowledge that more work still need to be done. The ICPD Beyond 2014 review report and the Secretary's report clearly show that persistent gaps and barriers have continued to delay the full implementation of the ICPD-POA.

We therefore urge the global community to accelerate implementation of the ICPD objectives and the Key Actions in order to achieve dignity and well-being for all.

The time is right and that time is right now to build the future we want for many young people, women and girls across the globe as we transit into the Post-2015 development agenda, where the focus is on sustainable development goals.

Sustainable development includes investing in life long health and education for young people who today constitute a large number of the world's population than any time in the history of humankind. Sustainable development is also about reproductive justice, that is, providing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for all people, without discrimination on the basis of age, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation, economic status or religion. These are the building blocks for the full implementation of the rights-based framework in advancing the ICPD agenda. And these are building blocks for the future that we all want for our children and many generations to come.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the recent review of the South African Population Policy as well as the ICPD-POA reveals a systematic decline in the country's population growth rate. This decline is expected to continue in the future. Like other developing countries, South Africa has a youthful age structure, with sixty eight percent of the population younger than 35 years. According to the 2011 Census data, the youth (i.e. 14 – 35 years) constitute thirty seven percent of the population.

This age cohort is critical to the country's continued development and demographic evolution as they represent new entrants to the labour market and serve as the basis for future demographic growth. Recognising the importance of addressing the rights and the needs of youth, the South African Government has taken measures to improve access to quality education and skills development, quality and affordable health services, including modern sexual and reproductive

health and rights services as well as access to decent employment opportunities towards the realisation of the so-called 'demographic dividend'.

South Africa's transition from apartheid to a democratic state has been a success. In the last twenty one years, we have built democratic institutions and extended public services to many of our people who have been systematically neglected for many years by the apartheid regime. We have achieved a remarkable decline in poverty from fifty seven percent in 2006 to forty five percent in 2011. Despite these successes, too many of our people, in particular black Africans, females and female-headed households, rural households, the youth and people with disabilities are still disproportionately affected by poverty and we remain a highly unequal society.

Chairperson, drawing on our collective successes and challenges in implementing the ICPD-POA in the last twenty one years, we need to do more to build the future we want through the ICPD Beyond 2014 and the Sustainable Development Agenda. To that end, the South African Government has committed to the following during the current electoral term:

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

The visionary and ground-breaking ICPD Programme of Action squarely put people at the centre of attaining sustainable development. In particular, it placed the human rights of women, including their reproductive rights and health, at the centre of population and development. SRHR is key to gender equality and empowerment. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, many of these rights are often neglected, trampled on or met with abuse, violence or persecution – especially the sexual and reproductive

rights of those who are marginalised and excluded, including youth and people with disabilities.

SRHR is key to addressing gender equality and women's empowerment and should therefore be addressed from a reproductive justice and human rights perspective. I therefore take this opportunity to welcome the inclusion of SRHR in the Open Working Group's proposals on the Sustainable Development Goals which we believe forms the basis for negotiations on the post 2015 Development Agenda. As part of our national efforts to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes for young people, our Cabinet recently approved the National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Framework Strategy for public comments.

Through this initiative, we will work to fully to ensure that young people have access to information and services, including easy and affordable access to appropriate and youth- friendly services and facilities.

Gender Equality, Equity and the Empowerment of Women

Ladies and Gentlemen, gender inequality continues to be a serious impediment to the implementation of the Cairo Consensus. In this context, gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women remain fundamental prerequisites for the attainment of sustainable human development. As a country, we have made great strides in ensuring women's involvement in political and decision making processes. Despite progress made, many identified gender inequalities persist and new ones are emerging including high levels of female poverty and the increase in violence against women. The South African Government remains committed to promoting equality between women and men and to a genuine empowerment of

women, focusing among other gender relevant issues, on tackling Gender Based Violence.

As part of the broad reproductive justice agenda, we are equally committed to fight for the human rights of all people and we stand against the continued persecution and marginalisation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI). Never again can we afford to be by-standers and allow millions of women and girls across the globe to be left behind through denial of their human rights. We must all commit to the attainment of dignity and human rights of all our people.

Dynamics of a Changing Population Age Structure: Causes and Consequences

As stated earlier, South Africa has a relatively youthful age structure, with more than two thirds of the population younger than 35 years of age. However the country is also showing signs of a maturing age structure, as indicated by the increase in the median age from 22 years in 1996 to 25 years in 2011. Our country's changing demography and the resultant socio economic changes pose interesting challenges and opportunities for us and requires long term planning that is evidence based, hence its inclusion as a population policy priority for the current term of government.

This population policy priority will in particular highlight the causes and consequences of a changing population age structure, including children and youth; population concerns affecting people with disabilities as well as the lack of reliable demographic data concerning this group. Other priority areas include: the growing proportion of older persons; the impact of HIV and AIDS; the increase in the proportion of those available for work (*i.e.* 15 – 64) juxtaposed with the unavailability of work and subsequent

consequences, particularly as far as the realisation of the demographic dividend is concerned as well as fertility and mortality trends.

Migration and Urbanisation

Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen, twenty-one years into a democratic South Africa, the apartheid spatial divide continues to dominate our landscape, with serious policy implications. For example, the 2011 census data shows that in Gauteng Province alone, 7.6 Million were counted in 1996. This number grew to 9.2 Million in 2001 and to 12.3 Million during the last count in 2011. As one of the key actions of the ICPD-POA, migration and urbanisation remain a key population priority for the South African Government.

Chairperson, our delegation is pleased to reaffirm our continued support for further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and to the realisation of the future we want through the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

As I conclude, I would like to highlight specific population and development issues that South Africa will champion, but will require cooperation and collective leadership from all Member States during the year ahead:

- Sustain our leadership role in setting standards for, and interpreting the ICPD-PoA and the post-2015 development agenda within the broader development and human rights fields; clarify matters and attempt to influence countries with different mind sets. As early as 2001, the population and development debate began to revolve around rights issues. A number of countries are struggling with human rights and

related issues, and it is especially delicate in Africa. When promoting rights, the situation becomes complex, particularly when rights addressing the status of women is concerned;

- Section 9(2) of our constitution prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds including gender, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, age, marital status, disability and pregnancy. The same constitution binds the executive in all our actions which means that South Africa will continue to champion the promotion and protection of all of these rights. We do this not only because we have to but because our own history of fighting oppression enjoins us morally to do so. .
- We commit ourselves to continue working, without any ambiguity to advance South Africa's role in ensuring the integration of population matters in the Post 2015 Development Agenda, with specific focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and other communicable and non-communicable diseases; migration and the rights of migrants; gender; and population dynamics;

Chairperson and distinguished delegates,

South Africa will continue to push vigorously for the implementation the ICPD Programme of Action as we have been doing for the past twenty one years and as reflected in our nation policies and programmes. Our march on the road to dignity by 2030 as outlined by the Secretary General is long and challenging, but we stand ready to continue to work with the rest of the democratic world in keeping the Cairo Consensus and the Post-2015 Development Agenda alive.

Twenty one years after the Cairo Consensus, and on an occasion such as this, nothing is more appropriate and more inspirational than the words of the first democratically elected President of the Republic of South Africa, Tata Nelson Mandela when he said: "our work is far from complete".

I thank you.