



Oral Statement at the 48<sup>th</sup> Commission on Population & Development  
on the Theme Realizing the Future We Want:  
Integrating Population Issues Into Sustainable Development

Thank you, Madame Chair, and distinguished delegates. I speak on behalf of the World Youth Alliance, a coalition of over 80,000 individual young people and one million more through affiliated organizations from every corner of the globe, committed to understanding, promoting, and defending human dignity. We welcome the opportunity to address this year's theme, "Realizing the Future We Want: Integrating Population Issues into Sustainable Development." As the largest youth generation to date, we are the inheritors of the future being built here today.

"[R]ecognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." This, from the very first line of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is not only the foundation of human rights, but the reason why development matters, the reason why we must leave no member of the human family behind. It is also the cornerstone of our work at the World Youth Alliance. There can be no authentic development without respect for every single human being, not only the powerful, but those who are weak, vulnerable, and hidden from our sight.

As the Commission examines ways to integrate population issues into development, we affirm that people are our greatest resource. As stated in Rio, sustainable development must be person-centered. To achieve authentic development and poverty eradication, we must recognize that development is the shared work not only of the United Nations, the Member States, and even civil society organizations, but of every person. Policies at every level should reflect that people are not merely passive beneficiaries, but active contributors whose creativity and industry will build the future we want. We just need the education and empowerment to do it.

There has been much discussion of harnessing the "demographic dividend," particularly regarding developing nations. Such a dividend is not the inevitable result of demographic transition, and experience shows that rapid demographic changes

Africa  
Asia Pacific  
Europe  
Latin America  
Middle East  
North America

bring their own challenges and possible negative effects. If the thrust of these efforts is to decrease population, rather than empower everyone, especially young people, it will limit what development efforts can accomplish. Instead, invest in us; *we* are your dividend.

In some regions, most notably Europe, the demographic transition created by rapid decreases in fertility and improvements in life expectancy has resulted a large ageing population. Europe's population loss and the resulting instability cast doubt on whether it has truly completed the demographic transition. An increasingly small youth population struggles to find jobs that can support themselves and ensure the wellbeing of older generations. In some countries, half of young adults are unemployed. Without employment, they cannot drive development or support the aged. Any population and demographic policy that does not take this into consideration fails to meet the needs of youth and elderly persons, and those of the human family as a whole.

The discourse regarding decreasing fertility often promotes it as a panacea to problems like gender inequality, poverty, and maternal health. Contraception use may decrease the number of births, but it will not make childbearing safer. Fewer poor people does not constitute the eradication of poverty. And authentic gender equality means systems that account for women's needs in addition to men's, rather than encouraging women to suppress our bodies' natural functions to fit a system designed for male bodies. We deserve solutions that address problems at the root, rather than their symptoms.

Young people around the world face very real challenges. For some, even the most basic needs remain unmet due to poverty, conflict, and exploitation. All young people need stable families, peaceful communities, sanitation, good nutrition, education, and health care. If we focus our efforts on these, and empower local communities to direct their development based on their priorities, needs, and values, we will build a future to be proud of. As several Member States have said this week, young people are the future. We deserve better than trendy hashtags for controversial

policies that ultimately do not meet our needs and do not reflect the priorities of the majority of the world's youth.

A core principle of the World Youth Alliance is solidarity. In solidarity, we work together in pursuit of the common good. This principle helps us to see the connection that our shared humanity and the equal dignity of all creates among us. There is no characteristic which lessens the dignity of any human being: not race or ethnicity, not sex, not disability, not age nor size.

Because each human being has inestimable value, we have an obligation to ensure that she has the opportunity to thrive. Our members, from Africa and Asia Pacific, Europe and Latin America, the Middle East and North America, stand in solidarity with each other and for development that meets the authentic needs of all people, from those not yet born to those in the twilight of their years. To achieve person-centered, truly sustainable development, we can accept nothing less.

Madame Chair, I finish as I started, with the dignity of each person as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the Declaration, "dignity" is not about honors or achievements, nor attainment of a certain level of material comfort, but the universal, inherent value of every human life. Human dignity is not an end, but the foundation for all just ends. The poorest, the most vulnerable, the forgotten have as much dignity as the wealthy, the strong, and the acclaimed. Recognizing this dignity, we seek each other's wellbeing.

We are all responsible, collectively and individually, to protect and defend this human dignity, especially in our development policies. The future we want can only be built upon this foundation: that every human being matters, and is therefore worthy of respect and a role in a shared future. We encourage people at all levels to incorporate people, and not merely "population issues", into the sustainable development agenda. Thank you.