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**Commission on Population and Development  
49th Session, Agenda Item 4  
General Debate on National Experience in Population Matters:  
Strengthening the Demographic Evidence Base for the Post-2015 Development Agenda**

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Kal Sauer,  
Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations**

Madame Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finland aligns itself with the statement made by the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

Madame Chairperson,

*I would like to start with a topic that is very close to my heart and also of great relevance to my country when it comes to population matters:*

Finland has a long-term interest and also well-functioning systems in place for sexual and reproductive health and rights. These are essential issues of human life – the right to decide upon one's own body, sexuality, health, relationships, marriage and having children. They are at the core of any attempt to enhance sustainable development.

Madame Chairperson,

We have a long tradition of health monitoring in Finland by using the rich material of statistical information, registers and population-based surveys. These data are constantly used in evaluating health policy, and I wish to give you a few examples:

Firstly, the maternal and newborn mortality rates have been low in Finland for decades, and there are no signs for the trend to reverse. This is remarkable, since the number of those giving birth with various risk factors, such as advanced age and chronic diseases, has increased.

Secondly, a good example of successful policy has been the decreasing number of teenage pregnancies, which has almost halved, after introducing, at school, mandatory health education, with a strong component of comprehensive sexuality education. Also, sexual and reproductive health services have been strengthened at the local level. There are, however, places for improvements: not all municipalities have introduced free contraception for young people, although it has been recommended by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Thirdly, the national health examination surveys have shown that functional capacity has improved for most age groups, but especially for men and women aged 55 years or more. The national health policy aim to add years to life - and life to years has been successful.

Finally, at the same time though, a worrisome trend has been increased mortality differences between population groups when disaggregated by the socioeconomic status. We need to find ways of tackling it better.

Madame Chairperson,

Coming now to the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals, I wish to re-iterate the crucial role of population data. As we are preparing for the national follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda we, as many others, see the ICPD Programme of Action being at its core. Data has to be disaggregated and reliable, ensuring a human rights-based approach when collecting and using it. Our evidence base is no stronger than the accuracy and relevance of the data we gather.

Madame Chairperson,

Finland is a long-standing partner of UNFPA. We were especially happy to support UNFPA's work in Myanmar, while cooperating with the government in conducting a successful 2014 Population and Housing Census. We are also eager to continue cooperation in a joint initiative "Women and Girls First". Good quality data is needed, particularly, when planning and providing comprehensive reproductive health services. The role of UNFPA in supporting countries during different stages of census, and in helping to use and disseminate data, has been important. In addition, we highly value the cooperation with women's, youth and other civil society organizations and partners, as we work together in this field.

In Finland, our population is aging, which poses both benefits and challenges. But I also like to stress that adolescents and youth worldwide need our attention. Both aging and young persons can become socially excluded in the society. The challenges for meeting their needs are universal, and the responsibility is shared. Both elderly and young people need to be fully involved in decision-making on issues related to their own lives.

Madame Chairperson,

Data gathered globally shows that much progress has been made in enhancing the lives of the people, but development has been uneven. Inequality and multiple forms of discrimination are barriers to many women and girls still today. It is important that these issues get documented and reported. Demographic evidence, including population dynamics and trends, should translate to better planning and action for achieving sustainable results.

Madame Chairperson,

Going back to the unique Cairo agenda and the outcomes of its reviews, we are now eager to move forward in implementing the ICPD beyond 2014 and the SDGs in an interlinked manner. By **building effective partnerships we can support sexual and reproductive health and rights of all individuals.**

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.