

**STATEMENT BY JACQUES VAN ZUYDAM,
CHIEF DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL POPULATION UNIT,
ON BEHALF OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA,
TO THE FIFTIETH (50th) SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT,
3-7 APRIL 2017, ON
*CHANGING POPULATION AGE STRUCTURES AND SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT***

Madam Chairperson

The South African delegation wishes to join other delegations in extending our congratulations to you and the other members of the Bureau on your election as our leadership team for the 50th Session of the Commission on Population and Development. The session theme, *Changing population age structures and sustainable development*, represents one of the most important conversations that should be had by humanity at this point in time. My delegation therefore wishes to assure you of our full cooperation and support during the deliberations at this session, and of our commitment to seek consensus in an outcome that will guide us towards sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

Allow me to assure you and all distinguished delegates of my government's continued commitment to the full implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, the Key Actions for its further implementation, as well as the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development in Africa beyond 2014. We regard the ICPD Programme of Action as one of the fundamental building blocks for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

We would also like to take note of and appreciate the reports that were prepared for this session, and that will be presented to us during this week. We wish to thank the Secretary General and the relevant entities that produced them, including for continuously updating us on the financial flows that support the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. These reports remain essential to measure progress, and to address identified gaps and challenges.

The South African delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by Ecuador on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Chairperson

In 1994, we set ourselves goals as the international community, guided by our common desire and collective vision to invest in our populations as key to sustainable development. These goals were reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is our global blueprint for development, including safeguards to advance comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights for all women and girls. These rights have featured prominently in efforts to respond to health challenges, particularly HIV/Aids. More needs to be done to ensure that while health challenges affects all populations and need addressing, women and girls are not further disadvantaged due to a lack of these rights.

Chairperson and distinguished delegates, my country remains committed the principle that no person should be subjected to discrimination or violence based on race, class, sex, religion, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. It is the same value base that guides our stance on fighting for equality between countries, and why we shall always make our voices heard about exploitation and oppression of people in any form. This includes the oppression of people in the occupied territories of Palestine and Western Sahara. We sincerely believe that no-one should be left behind.

Chairperson

South Africa's population age structure has changed considerably over the past twenty years. First, the HIV/Aids epidemic impacted severely thereon by killing many young men and women. In recent years the implementation of our government's anti-retroviral treatment programme has assisted to significantly reverse those impacts. Our life expectancy has almost recovered to pre-HIV/Aids levels. Today, older persons form the fastest growing age group in our population,

whilst young people between the ages of 15 and 25 make up the largest age cohorts.

This population age transition informed the population policy priorities of our current term of government, which have been incorporated into the overall government work programme. The priorities are the following:

- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) with a particular focus on adolescents;
- Gender Equality, Equity and the Empowerment of Women;
- Dynamics of a Changing Population Age Structure: Causes and Consequences; and
- Migration and Urbanisation.

These priorities also contribute to our ongoing efforts to reduce persistent economic inequality, which has age, race, gender and geographic dimensions, amongst others.

Since 1994, the South African Government has pursued a number of strategies aimed at better equipping young people to become economically independent. The fundamental principles of this approach are contained in the National Youth Policy (2015-2020), which recognises the vital role that young people play in building South Africa, and seeks to ensure that there are processes and opportunities that allow young people to develop and realise their potential, and for our society to reap the demographic dividend.

In conclusion, Madam Chairperson and distinguished colleagues. The International Population Conference of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (the IUSSP) will be hosted by Statistics South Africa later this year, on 29 October to 4 November, in Cape Town. It is our pleasure to invite all distinguished delegates and observers present here to the conference. It presents an important opportunity to engage scientifically on the world's population dynamics, and to put more substance into the matters that we are deliberating on this week. Off course it also presents an opportunity to visit my beautiful country!

I thank you