

52nd session of the Commission on Population and Development

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Opening remarks of UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem at the 52nd session of the Commission on Population and Development



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Mr. Chairperson,
Deputy Secretary-General,
Assistant Secretary-General,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to address the 52nd session of the Commission on Population and Development.

For 25 years, this Commission has played a vital role in the advancement of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), providing a platform for policy dialogue and advice based on sound evidence. As we look ahead to the next 25 years and as the 2030 deadline for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals draws nearer, this work is more important than ever.

This Commission is the home of the ICPD, and today we commemorate and celebrate the actions of Member States 25 years ago in 1994, when 179 countries and many other stakeholders endorsed the landmark Programme of Action in Cairo.

Let us celebrate the extraordinary progress made since then. Maternal death has declined by around 40 per cent. Rates of child marriage and female genital mutilation have fallen. Primary school is accessible to most children in the world, and human life expectancy has increased by 7 years since 1994. Thanks in great part to national

strategies and leadership. And thanks in great part also to the United Nations in action. Governments, UN agencies, civil society, communities and our partners—we the peoples, all nations, large and small.

The vision and values of the ICPD – that development must be people-centered, and attend to strengthening equal access to health, education, and human dignity for all persons – anticipated the vision and values of the 2030 Agenda, our common blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in years to come.

The values and wisdom of the ICPD, which have contributed to the progressive realization of rights for many people, are integral to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Indeed, this is why the Commission decided to focus this year's session on both the review of ICPD and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda.

The Programme of Action boldly asserts that with development, including access to education and health care, and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, individuals and couples will choose the number of children best for them, women and girls will be more empowered, and all of society will benefit.

This assertion has proven true.

Yet, the successes we have seen are not sufficient.

We must not allow generalized success to cause us to lose sight of the fact that millions of people are still waiting for the promise of the ICPD.

- The more than 10 million girls who will be married under the age of 18 in 2019.
- The nearly 4 million girls who will undergo female genital mutilation this year.
- The 60 per cent of young people in Africa who will not access secondary school.
- The more than 200 million women and adolescent girls waiting for modern contraception.
- We also face the challenges of protecting women and girls from sexual violence, and ensuring safe deliveries, even in humanitarian settings.

Reaching those furthest behind may prove the most challenging. The majority of those still waiting reside in countries with some of the most fragile health systems, high rates of poverty, low literacy, high gender inequality, limited access to modern transport, and populations in some of the hardest-to-reach areas.

Many also face the threat of natural disasters, now exacerbated by climate change. Still other countries face protracted conflict or displacement that is setting back gains on ICPD as we speak.

We have ambitious aims to end unmet need for family planning, end maternal death, and end gender-based violence and harmful practices by 2030. This will require innovative approaches, better mapping and estimation of needs, new partnerships and funding, and the interdisciplinary approach of One-UN.

Our collective success in these areas is integral to the success of the 2030 agenda. How do we move the needle significantly for those still left behind? How do we break down our silos? How do we bring in new voices and a broader range of partners, and above all, the robust financing needed to deliver bold, integrated, innovative solutions that drive transformative change for the women and girls still waiting for all that the ICPD promised? Let this Commission issue a clarion call to the world: They have waited long enough! It is time for all of us to pick up the pace.

In the current era of reform, UNFPA is working with our partners to pioneer new solutions, deliver better together and enhance financing for transformative results. This work includes a costing and financing initiative for sexual and reproductive health and rights that will support efforts to fill the \$2.5 trillion annual financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals. With just 12 years left to the 2030 deadline, it's time for urgent action and ambitious financing commitments, based on the best available evidence and data.

To this end, UNFPA is also working with countries and the UN system to build stronger population data systems that can find the furthest behind, a foremost priority of ICPD that the entire 2030 Agenda depends on.

As we mark 25 years since the ICPD, we at UNFPA are also celebrating our 50th anniversary. These milestones offer a collective opportunity to recommit to ensuring that everyone everywhere reaps the benefits of this transformative agenda, whose implementation is essential for accelerating progress across the SDGs. The High-level Political Forum and other high-level UN events throughout this year will help galvanize political and financial commitments and action commensurate with our ambitious global goals.

The deliberations of the Commission this week and in the months and years ahead are crucial to this endeavor.

Moreover, we face a number of increasingly urgent challenges related to population and development, including one concern touching many governments here present – low fertility and ageing. These are real challenges, even as they represent gains of development, including greater human life expectancy and greater freedoms for women and girls.

Here again, the ICPD Programme of Action offers insightful guidance. It underscores reproductive rights and choices that enable people not to have more or fewer children, but to have the number of children they want.

What is clear is that the work of this Commission and its attention to current and emerging issues will remain vital for years to come.

Distinguished Delegates

I look forward to the adoption of your political declaration later this morning, and I thank the Chairman, Ambassador Courtenay Rattray, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the United Nations, for his skillful stewardship of the negotiations leading to this consensus. In the end, what unites us is stronger than what divides us. ICPD is a benchmark for certain truths on which we can all agree: No woman should die giving life. Individuals and couples should be able to choose whether or when to have children and how many they will have.

No one should be subjected to gender-based violence.

Addressing delegates in Cairo, my predecessor Dr. Nafis Sadik laid out the fundamental underpinnings of our collective quest. She said:

"The key to sustainable development will be finding the balance between human needs and demands, and the resources available to support them. People are at the heart of the process, as agents and as beneficiaries. We have it in our power to lighten their burdens, remove obstacles in their path and permit them the full flowering of their potential as human beings. That is the moral and ethical basis of the ICPD."

It is also the foundation of the 2030 Agenda.

For 25 years, we have been guided by this truth: People are at the heart of sustainable development. I urge all nations to see their people in this agenda for a better world for all.

Let us stand together for our young people, whose well-being, empowerment and opportunities will determine our success in 2030 and for years to come.

This year the road from Cairo leads to Nairobi for the ICPD25 Summit in November. Let's bring the promise of Cairo to every person on the planet. Let's keep moving forward to a world of rights and choices, and health and dignity for all.

Thank you.