

54TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT, 19–23 April 2021

GENERAL DEBATE

STATEMENT BY H.E. MS. DOMA TSHERING, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BHUTAN

Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Royal Government of Bhutan, I extend warmest congratulations to Ambassador Yemdaogo Eric Tiare of Burkina Faso, Chairperson of the Fifty Fourth Session of the Commission on Population and Development, and the Members of the Bureau on your election. Please count on my delegation's full support as you steer our work in the days ahead.

The Commission meets today on the important theme of 'Population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development.' The theme this year takes on particular importance in light of growing global population pressures, and as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt food systems, increase poverty, damage public health, and undermine major nutrition programmes such as school feeding, taking us further from the goal of ending hunger by 2030.

As reflected in the Secretary General's report, these impacts are felt most deeply by women and girls across all continents, not only in the higher prevalence of food insecurity and lowered nutrition rates, but also in the reported increased levels of gender based violence, reduced access to essential health and social protection services, including sexual and reproductive health, as well as crisis centers, shelters and legal aid. These trends risk reversal of hard earned gains. As we look at recovering from the pandemic, gender differentiated impacts and needs must continue to guide our strategies, and also provide adequate protection to our women and girls.

Mr. Chair,

We are grateful to Her Majesty Queen Mother of Bhutan Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, for the inspiring Keynote Address at the opening of the Session. Her Majesty was pleased to underscore that "Now is no longer the time to ask whether there is a problem; now is the time for solutions."

In that spirit, my delegation encourages that deliberations of the Commission continue to press for a meaningful outcome, rooted in principles of the ICPD, with action-oriented recommendations.

The principles of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) remain as relevant today as they were 27 years ago. All individuals should be empowered to live their lives with equality, rights and dignity.

Since the adoption of ICPD in 1994, Bhutan has made progress in achieving a number of commitments. The maternal mortality ratio reduced from 560 in 1990 to 89 in 2019 and the fertility rate reached the replacement level of 1.7 in 2019. From 1994 to 2019, the overall infant mortality rate per 1000 live births fell from 70 to 15, while the under-five mortality rate fell from 100 to 34. The contraceptive prevalence rate has risen from 18.8 in 1994 to 65.6 in 2019.

Challenges nevertheless remain, and there is still much to be done. Towards that end, my government stands by the conviction that meaningful and sustainable development will be achieved only when women and girls can enjoy equal rights and opportunities to contribute as full members of society. Our reaffirmation of the ICPD process is clearly outlined in the commitments we made at Nairobi in 2019 which include commitments to continued provision of free access to public health services in including SRH related services, strengthened infrastructure and services for fertility and labour analgesia, implementation of a policy for accelerated mother and child health care as well as a strategy for cervical cancer, intensified efforts to improve access to information and services related to adolescent sexual reproductive health and rights through comprehensive sexuality education, implementation of a national gender equality policy, and mobilization of resources through innovative financing mechanisms to finance programs related to ICPD Plan of Action, to name a few.

Mr. Chair,

Bhutan's pursuit of the 2030 Agenda is firmly anchored in the path of Gross National Happiness. The interests of our people and their wellbeing remain central in our pursuit of an inclusive, equitable, just and sustainable future.

As we consolidate efforts to strengthen the foundations for a future where full equality, rights, dignity and happiness of all persons can be realized, Bhutan remains resolute in fulfilling our promise to leave no one behind.

Thank you.