

**THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS AT THE 54<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON  
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

19 APRIL 2021

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,**

**It is a pleasure to address this important gathering.**

**We have achieved many milestones since the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994.**

**Over the past 27 years, the world has seen significant improvements in poverty reduction and food security. Health systems have substantially improved. Maternal deaths have declined by around 40 per cent. We have witnessed continuing increases in life expectancy, and expanded access to primary education for both boys and girls. Girls and adolescents today are less likely to face child marriage and female genital mutilation.**

**But as we take stock of progress, the picture is clear: we are far from where we need to be. Too many are still being left behind, unable to fulfil their aspirations or exercise their rights. The Sustainable Development Goals cannot, and will not, be achieved until women, girls and young people are able to control their bodies and their lives, and live a life free from fear and violence.**

**We are at a pivotal moment in advancing the Cairo agenda.**

**The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated livelihoods, exacerbated injustices and inequalities, and threatened decades of development progress.**

**In this context, the Commission's focus on food security and nutrition could not be more timely.**

**Sadly, the world is not on track to eliminate hunger and malnutrition by 2030. Undernourishment was already rising before the pandemic, and the trend has worsened considerably over the past year.**

**Meanwhile, billions of people suffer from multiple and overlapping forms of malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiencies and obesity, and cannot afford healthy diets.**

**The nutritional status of the most vulnerable groups is likely to deteriorate further due to the health and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.**

**Unless we act now, hundreds of millions of children and adults will face poverty and hunger. Poor nutrition in childhood, adolescence and during pregnancy risk damage to personal health and development throughout the life course.**

**COVID-19 is also exacerbating food crises caused by conflict, severe climate events and pest infestations.**

**Just as climate change is threatening the stability of food systems, so do current patterns of food consumption and production drive climate change. The global food system contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, land degradation and biodiversity loss, among other grave harms to the environment and to human health.**

**By shifting towards sustainable approaches--through balanced diets, responsible consumption and production, and fairer distribution of income and food--we can achieve major improvements in food security.**

**The livelihoods of 4.5 billion people are tied to our food systems. For them, and for the health of all the world's people, we must seize this moment of potential transformation.**

**Guided by the SDGs, the Food Systems Summit later this year gives us the opportunity to advance in five key areas: access to safe and nutritious food, sustainable consumption patterns, nature-positive production, equitable livelihoods and resilience.**

**Excellencies,**

**Across these efforts, we must sustain the ICPD's focus on the rights of women, girls and young people.**

**Despite the significant contributions of women to food production, they face a higher prevalence of food insecurity than men. Meanwhile, women are facing increased household and community demands due to the pandemic, and often must feed their families on reduced incomes.**

**The pandemic exacerbates household stress, putting women and girls at a higher risk of male violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence. This limits their access to sexual and reproductive health services and undermines their reproductive rights. Access to essential maternal health and nutrition services has become constrained.**

**The health and nutrition of adolescents have been compromised as a result of disrupted access to school, school feeding and health services.**

**We are also witnessing alarming increases in harmful practices, and a steep rise in adolescent pregnancies and child marriages. UNFPA projections reinforce the reality that COVID-19 is a crisis with a woman's face.**

**We must ensure women's full and effective participation in pandemic response and recovery and in all other spheres.**

**Excellencies,**

**The adoption of an action-oriented outcome by the Commission will be an important contribution to implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and to the Decade of Action for the SDGs.**

**It will also send a strong message to upcoming Summits, including the Food Systems Summit.**

**I wish you the best in your deliberations this week.**

**Thank you.**

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