

Fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Population and Development

Opening Remarks (5 min) by

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Monday 25 April 2022 | 10:00-10:45

Conference Room 1 | UNHQ | New York

Mr. Chairperson,
Deputy Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Civil society friends,
Dear colleagues,

What a pleasure it is to meet in person once again. A very warm welcome to delegates from capitals and to civil society partners.

In this world of tremendous upheaval and uncertainty, I must begin by emphatically stating the truth borne out by the evidence and I do so plainly: today, every crisis has a decidedly female face.

The face of a woman haunted by the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence, stalked by conflict or, too often, subjected to both. The face of a girl married or mutilated against her will, pregnant before her body is ready, as barriers are thrown up to protective sexual and reproductive health services. The face of a girl kept out of school due to pandemic disruptions, and further excluded from learning by poverty and the digital divide.

Conflict, climate shocks and the continuing COVID-19 pandemic leave us grappling with deep social, health and economic consequences. The maintenance of peace and security remains a challenge, threatening progress towards our shared goals.

The Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 reiterated the importance of rights and choices for all as critical for achieving sustainable development and inclusive economic growth. Yet the recent report of the High-Level Commission on the Nairobi Summit follow-up, titled “*No Exceptions, No Exclusions: Realizing sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice for all*” notes distressing setbacks around the world. The report calls for ambitious, deliberate, comprehensive action to achieve sexual and reproductive justice for all.

We cannot afford further reversals. The stakes for women, girls and young people, and for their societies, are far too high.

The Covid-19 pandemic made painfully clear the need for massive investments in national health systems that are universal, resilient, data-driven and adequately staffed. And there are unique benefits to investing in comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

Family planning improves health outcomes and enables women and girls to remain in school and acquire skills that will raise their lifetime earnings. It is estimated that every dollar invested in ending preventable maternal deaths and unmet need for family planning will bring nearly \$9.00 US dollars in economic benefits by 2050.

UNFPA’s 2022 State of World Population Report “*Seeing the Unseen: The case for action in the neglected crisis of unintended pregnancy*” reveals that nearly half of all pregnancies are unintended. Lack of bodily autonomy and reproductive choices continue to block women’s path to equality and full participation in economic life.

Targeted action is needed to eliminate the structural barriers and discriminatory laws and social norms that impede women’s economic opportunities and result in gender inequalities in pay, access to capital, pensions and other forms of social protection.

Women dominate the care economy, and perform three-quarters of unpaid care work, a burden that increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. This work remains largely invisible, unrecognized and unaccounted for in national accounts and policymaking. This must change.

Yet you can't change what you can't see. To locate and reach those furthest behind, all governments need to be able to collect and use timely, high-quality, disaggregated population and development data. Unfortunately, the resources devoted to data systems overall, including population data, are woefully inadequate.

Member States should be supported to ensure the timely completion of the 2020 census round; improve civil registration and vital statistics; and encourage development planning that responds to national and local population trends and needs.

The decline in funding for population-related matters, especially sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, undermines the development of human capital when it is desperately needed. Adequate investment is required urgently to enable every girl and woman to complete her education, pursue her dreams, and make a living that protects her from poverty, vulnerability and abuse.

Distinguished delegates,

We must do more where it counts.

Let's work diligently and together to reverse our current trajectories and recommit to economic growth that includes everyone – women and girls, indigenous populations, people of African descent, migrants, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons.

Some 28 years after the Cairo ICPD, UNFPA again declares the immense wisdom of putting women and girls at the centre of economic and social development and at the centre of efforts towards peace. That is the path to sustainable and equitable development. That is how we will achieve a world where every pregnancy is intended, every childbirth is safe, and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

It is time for the world to show greater ambition and urgency around the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the outcomes of its reviews, which are an accelerator for the Sustainable Development Goals.

I call on you to recognize those critical linkages and ensure that the resolution adopted by the Commission contains meaningful, action-oriented recommendations that advance progress towards the achievement of the ICPD and 2030 agendas.

I look forward to today's presentations and wish you every success in your important deliberations.

Thank you.
