Day of 8 Billion

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Statement by Ms. Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for
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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen,

As announced on 11 July when we shared the latest round of United Nations estimates and projections of world population, today, on 15 November, the world is reaching, and surpassing, the milestone of 8 billion inhabitants.

The unprecedented growth of the global population is the result of two parallel trends: on the one hand, the gradual increase in average human longevity due to widespread advances in public health, nutrition, personal hygiene and medicine, and on the other hand, the persistence of high levels of fertility in many countries.

As the world is meeting in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, marking the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, this is a moment to look beyond the sheer numbers and to reflect on the impact of our growing human family on the planet.

This is also a moment to ask ourselves how we can lift up all 8 billion people, ensuring that they enjoy a good quality of life and empowering the most marginalized among them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no doubt that <u>both</u> unsustainable patterns of consumption and production <u>and</u> the rapid growth of the human population have contributed to environmental degradation, climate change, deforestation and loss of biodiversity.

Yet, the relationship between population growth and sustainable development is often misunderstood.

Certainly, rapid population growth poses challenges to economic and social progress, as it makes eradicating poverty, combatting hunger and malnutrition, and increasing the coverage of health and education systems more difficult.

At the same time, and this is perhaps less evident, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially those related to health, education and gender equality, will contribute to slowing global population growth. Expanded opportunities for education and employment contribute to a decline of fertility by changing incentives and intentions around marriage and childbearing and by promoting individual autonomy and decision making, especially for women and girls.

While it is true that slower population growth, if maintained over several decades, will help to mitigate environmental degradation, too often population growth is conflated with a rise in greenhouse gas emissions. This ignores the fact that countries with the highest levels of consumption and emissions are those where population growth is slow or even negative.

Meanwhile, the majority of the world's population growth is, and will increasingly be, concentrated among the world's poorest countries. These countries, which have significantly lower emissions rates, are likely to suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change, in part because they lack the resources needed to adapt to these changes and to mitigate their impacts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In order to usher in a world in which all 8 billion people can thrive, we need a rapid decoupling of economic activity from the current over-reliance on fossil-fuel energy, as well as greater efficiency in the use of such resources.

Wealthy countries and the international community can help to ensure that developing countries receive the necessary assistance — both technical and financial — so that their economies can grow using technologies that will minimize future greenhouse gas emissions.

More broadly, we need to redouble our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, through policies and programmes that make our world more inclusive, more equitable and more sustainable.

I am glad to be joined today by Mr. John Wilmoth, Director of the Population Division in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, who can assist in addressing any questions that you may have.

Thank you.