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The ICPD Program of Action is one of the key achievements of the United Nations, and it remains so relevant in a world undergoing rapid social and demographic changes.

We must recognize ICPD as an indicator of the value of multilateralism. Its Program of Action represents our collective vision and commitment to address the intersection between population, development, and human rights. A token of this commitment and vision is precisely the Political Declaration that was adopted for this 57<sup>th</sup> Conference.

It has been said that the ICPD gave a human face to development. It drew our attention to the special needs of young people. It highlighted the importance of taking age and gender as critical aspects of development strategies. It also made visible the special needs and rights of indigenous peoples and recognized the challenges faced by persons with disabilities.

It underscored the demands of women for their rights and access to sexual and reproductive health. It defined the role that men have in promoting gender equality. It also brought to the table the relationship between internal displacement, international migration, and its centrality in population dynamics. These interdependent factors have been, and continue to be, the key pillars of policy and development strategies and the epicenter of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

In the 30 years since adopting the Program of Action, we have witnessed remarkable advancements in medicine, science, health, agriculture, and education. Our human family now numbers 8 billion. More women survive pregnancy. More newborns make it through the precarious first months of life. Children are more likely to grow to adulthood and beyond, and people live longer and healthier lives.

Yet, despite this progress, we face overlapping and escalating crises – from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to the triple planetary climate change crisis, pollution, extinction, and historic levels of mass displacement worldwide. Weakened economies, conflict, food, energy, and water shortages pose threats everywhere in the world.

These are all human-made crises and demand human-made responses and collective action. A well-functioning international system based on cooperation and solidarity is vital. A United Nations that delivers and is well-equipped to respond to old and new challenges is essential.

Population and development go hand in hand. There are many valid and pressing concerns, such as the complex links between population size, jobs, income, fossil fuel consumption, and the increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Or challenges of budgeting for infrastructure, health services, and pension programs. But, when we treat these concerns as problems rather than people, we obscure the real issues we must address. Normative and policy responses need to put people at the center. In particular, the 712 million people living in extreme poverty.

And every one of these crises has a female face. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by division, polarization, wars, and the ecological crisis. Despite progress in some areas, such as the adoption of laws against domestic violence in at least 162 countries and a 34% reduction in maternal deaths, challenges remain. Gender-based violence persists in every country, with inequalities in income, access to health services, and the digital divide. The latest data from UNFPA show that, in 69 countries, one-quarter of women still cannot make their own healthcare decisions. 1 in 10 have no choice in using contraception.

We are witnessing a concerning trend of regression and pushback against policy and legislative gains on women's rights, including on FGM and child marriage.

Women represent more than half of the world's population, and their perspectives and leadership are indispensable in the decision-making processes. Evidence has shown that a greater presence of women in positions of power contributes to greater democracy, corrects power imbalances, and leads to more equitable decisions.

The ICPD Program of Action is more relevant than ever if we are to build inclusive, resilient, equitable, and peaceful societies that place people, their needs, rights, and aspirations at the center of development.

The ICPD is indeed one of the greatest multilateral achievements. Allow me to say once more that the challenges we face can only be fixed if we exercise our collective wisdom and power to transform. And where it all happens is here, the United Nations. Yet we know this house needs refurbishing and retooling. But we have the opportunity to do it at the Summit of the Future by crafting a new Pact of the Future that is ambitious, visionary, and actionable.

Today's commemoration should remind us that we share the same purpose: to work together for the right of every human to live with dignity, free from fear and free from want, and this is the essence of the ICPD.