

**Opening Remarks by Dr. Natalia Kanem,
Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund,
at the ICPD30 Commemorative Event
Monday, 29 April 2024 | 15:00
General Assembly Hall, New York**

Your Excellency Mr. Dennis Francis, President of the General Assembly,
Mr. Li Junhua, Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,
Ms. Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Executive Director of Global Women's Voices,
Ms. Ashley Judd, UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador,
Ms. Victoria Flamant, Youth Representative

Excellencies,

Dear young people, dear friends,

I greet you in peace, the noble purpose of the United Nations and the fervent wish of the women, girls and young people UNFPA serves everywhere. It is my honour to represent the Secretary-General at this commemoration.

Thirty years ago, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, adopted by 179 governments from all regions and diverse cultures, transformed the landscape of sustainable development by putting reproductive rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women, girls and young people at its centre. I was there in Cairo in 1994, and I vividly recall our idealism and the awareness of being witness to something extraordinary.

The Programme of Action marked a paradigm shift in thinking about population and development – from a focus on population numbers to a focus on the human

rights, dignity and wellbeing of individuals, particularly their right to decide freely whether or when to have children, to exercise autonomy over their body, to live free from violence.

The ICPD linked population dynamics to gender relations, demographic patterns, environmental sustainability and economic growth – a blueprint for action we would do well to remember as we build toward the Summit of the Future, continue to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, and chart the path ahead beyond 2030.

Consider the tremendous progress made over the past three decades.

- Between 2000 and 2020, maternal mortality declined by one third – the result of better access to prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, new maternal health medicines, and emergency obstetric care.
- Since 1990, the number of women using modern contraception has doubled.
- Since the year 2000, adolescent births have dropped by a third, and rates of child marriage have decreased globally.
- Progress in science, prevention, and treatment has lowered HIV transmission and reduced AIDS-related deaths.
- More than 160 countries have now passed laws to address domestic violence.

- Not so long ago, many countries in the world had legislation against LGBTQIA+ sexuality. Today, two thirds do not, and punitive laws are falling more quickly than ever.

These are gains we achieved together – governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations, and community leaders.

And yet today, progress is slowing.

Annual reductions in maternal deaths have flatlined. Inequalities, between and within countries, are widening. And the rights of women, girls and gender diverse people are the subject of increasing pushback.

In our world of 8 billion, there are more older people than ever before, and more younger people as well.

With shifts in global population, anxieties arise. And we know from experience that concerns about whether we are too many people or too few can lead to responses that risk undermining women's reproductive rights.

Earlier this month, over 500 young leaders from 130 countries came together to define their vision for the ICPD at the Global Youth Dialogue in Cotonou. They called for urgent action to realize their right to bodily autonomy, to education, to decent work, and to live in peaceful societies. They want more clout in decision-making and a greater voice in critical global conversations.

Two more global dialogues will follow – on demographic diversity and sustainable development in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in May, and on harnessing the power of technology for advancing women’s health, rights, and choices, in June here in New York.

Mr. President,

UNFPA is honoured to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development in this General Assembly session.

For the past 55 years and in the 30 years since Cairo, UNFPA has worked with governments and partners to support the most vulnerable women and girls with life-saving sexual and reproductive health services and information.

With your support, we ensure that women can exercise their right to make their own decisions over their bodies and their lives.

With your support, we can ensure that progress touches every community, every individual, no matter their ethnicity, sexual orientation, age or migration status.

We thank Member States for your leadership and partnership. Civil society for your vision, advocacy and action. And I thank the thousands of dedicated UNFPA staff across the globe for their hard work and tireless commitment to saving and improving lives.

My hope is that we leave here today with a powerful sense of purpose, ready to commit the investments and urgent action needed to bring the promise of Cairo to all those still waiting.

Imagine a 10-year-old girl, happily playing in her hilltop home. She's on the cusp of adolescence, and well prepared to navigate that adolescence with great anticipation, and without fear.

Her school is a vibrant hub of learning. Her first menstrual period is not a surprise, because she's learned all about the biology of her body. Adults in her life have equipped her with life-saving information, including how to protect herself from abuse.

If she gets around in a wheelchair, her difference is celebrated; inclusion is not an afterthought. She avoids early marriage and female genital mutilation. She completes her secondary education, which means in good time, she can support herself and any children she freely decides to have. In this world, our common future shines bright.

That is the vision of Cairo. Together, we can make it real for every girl, every woman, every young person. Let's build that brighter future of rights and choices – for everyone.