

HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SPEECH
AT THE 57TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR POPULATION AND
DEVELOPMENT, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, 29 APRIL-03 MAY 2024

Chairperson

May I congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election and state that my delegation and I look forward to fruitful deliberations. We align ourselves with the statement delivered on behalf of the Africa Group. May I also extend Eswatini's appreciation to the Secretary General for his thought-provoking remarks and expressed commitment towards taking the issues emanating from the review of the progress of implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action into the future.

The Kingdom of Eswatini wishes to express profound appreciation to the United Nations, and other organizations as well as national governments for the successful completion of the 30th review of the implementation of the ICPD undertaken at global, regional and national levels. The findings of the review will inform the direction we will take as a global community given the commitments we made in Cairo and Nairobi where we pledged to put people at the centre of development.

Chairperson

Over the last thirty years of ICPD implementation, we are proud to state that we have seen great improvements in the standard of living of Emaswati: they live longer, and women have more choices, especially on matters pertaining to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Children under the age of 5 years are

less likely to die today than they did three decades ago as shown by the under 5 mortality rate which declined by three quarters i.e. from 167 in 2007 to 41 per 1000 live births in 2021-22. Likewise, the country's life expectancy is showing signs of improvement following a significant decline because of HIV and AIDS mortality: it increased from 42 and 43 years for males and females respectively to 59 for males and 64 years females between 2007 and 2017. The country's efforts in the fight against HIV and AIDS are also evident in our achievements of the global targets of 95-95-95 , ahead of 2030. Notably, the HIV incidence declined by more than two times from a high of 2.4% to 0.77% between 2010-2011 and 2021-2022. Fertility has also dropped from a high of 6.4 during the pre-ICPD era to 3.2 children per woman in 2021-22. Whilst the adolescent birth rate for young women aged 15-19 declined from 87 per to 78 per 1000 women in 2014.

It is worth noting that these demographic changes have caused a shift in the age structure of the population, with census results indicating a continuing decrease in the population below the age of 15 years from 51% in 1976 to 36% in 2017 and an increase in the working age population from 46 % in 1976 to 59% in 2017. This age shift has opened a window of opportunity for spectacular economic prosperity. May I underscore that the Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini realizes the critical importance of investing in young people and empowering them so that they become productive members of society noting that Eswatini's population is predominately young (the median age of the population is just 21 years) In this regard, it is worth pointing out that some macro-economic policies are already in place to enable the country to reap the full benefits of the demographic dividend. In this context, the Government introduced Free Primary Education as well as the

Orphaned and Vulnerable Children's Fund to cater for the education of children in difficult circumstances up to high school level. As a result of these initiatives, the country has realized an increase in enrollment rates.

Other policies include the adoption of a competency-based curriculum by the education system to address the mismatch of skills. In addition, Government has established a Youth Development Fund in an endeavor to develop entrepreneurship skills among young people and to inculcate a culture of self-employment. Other youth empowerment initiatives include the 'Kick Start' and "Junior Achievers" which provide financial assistance and other means for the creation of development projects and curbing youth unemployment.

Chairperson

Eswatini has also made great strides in the attainment of gender equality as shown by the gender development index which stands at 0.71. We have seen improvements in gender parity at all levels of the education system as reflected by the gender parity index of 1.01, 1.19 and 0.96 at primary, secondary school and tertiary levels, respectively.

It is worth noting that population issues have been well integrated into key national policy documents including the National Development Plan, the National Health Policy, Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy, Education Policy, Gender Policy and the National Youth Policy. It is further worth noting that the country is in the process of revising the National Population Policy to incorporate among other things, megatrends such as climate change.

Let me at this juncture point out that as a country, we have encountered major challenges in our endeavor to achieve the goals and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action. First and foremost, the on-going conflict around the world has had an adverse impact on the domestic economy as manifested in the sluggish annual economic growth rate. The volatile food and energy prices, food insecurity, as well as the challenges posed by climate change and COVID19, have further aggravated the situation and curtailed the country's ability to invest in the economic and social sectors. Furthermore, our classification as a lower Middle Income Country militates against our ability to mobilize resources.

The country's maternal mortality ratio has remained at high of 452 deaths per 100 000 live births despite increases in skilled birth attendance and ante-natal care. COVID-19 laid bare our vulnerabilities in our health care system and caused a huge disruption in the supply chain of life-saving maternal health commodities. Consequently, the contraceptive prevalence rate dropped from 66% in 2014 to 57% in 2021-2022. Unmet need for family planning increased from 15% to 20% over the same period, thereby compromising the sexual and reproductive health and rights of thousands of women. Gender based violence is also high in Eswatini with the 2021-2022 MICS showing that 0.6% and 5.6% of women aged 15-19 years experienced sexual and physical violence respectively in the last 12 months preceding the survey.

Chairperson

In conclusion, let me re-affirm the full commitment of the Eswatini government to the ICPD Programme of Action post this session. I am confident that during this session we shall reach a consensus on how to move forward and ensure that the Population and Development agenda is fully incorporated in the global sustainable development agenda of the future.