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SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL STATEMENT

**57th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION FOR POPULATION AND
DEVELOPMENT**

29 APRIL – 3 MAY 2024

Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

I would like to congratulate you and the Bureau on your election and to thank you as well as the Secretariat, for the excellent organisation of this session. We are encouraged by the consensus adoption of the Political Declaration on this important occasion of the 30th anniversary of the ICPD, which reaffirmed the member states commitment to the implementation of the ICPD and its Program of Action.

As South Africa we consider this session as an important milestone stone in the history of Population and Development as it affords an opportunity for us to highlight the progress achieved over the past years and to acknowledge the remaining gaps in the implementation of the PoA. We welcome the Global Dialogues held to commemorate the 30th Anniversary and the Action Agenda adopted by the Global Youth Dialogue emphasises the importance of including the 1.9 Billion youth voices in order to achieve the PoA and Agenda 2063. The grassroots level discussions undertaken through these dialogues will help us reflect on challenges and opportunities that have emerged in recent years and their implications for sustainable development beyond 2030 and Africa's Agenda 2063.

Distinguished delegates,

This session coincides with the celebration of 30 years of freedom and democracy in South Africa as well as the 25th anniversary of the South African population policy, which are significant milestones in our nation's history. The current review of the South African Population Policy and the ICPD-PoA revealed a 1.8 percent increase in the country's population growth rate between 2011 and 2022. Like other developing countries, South Africa has a relatively youthful population, however, the country is undergoing an age transition from a young to an ageing population.

These population trends are influenced largely by the pro-poor policies that the South African government adopted since the dawn of our democracy in South Africa. To improve the wellbeing of our people, we invested a significant part of our country's GDP in education, skills development, health care, and employment. Our education policies have ensured inclusive and equitable quality education as well as promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. We achieved this by taking measures to improve access to quality education and skills development, ensuring the availability and affordability of education from early childhood through to adult education, with the emphasis on gender – sensitive and vocational education. Our efforts to improve women's opportunities at tertiary level paid off handsomely with the Gender Parity Index for enrolment being higher for females in all three Post-School Education and Training institutional types.

Chairperson,

Without a doubt the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the lives of many South Africans, with many having lost their jobs during the height of the pandemic. Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns had a significant impact on mental health. At the height of the pandemic, we introduced the Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress to save lives and livelihoods. Today, we are providing income support to more than 8 million unemployed adults to cushion them against hunger as they struggle to find their place in our economy. We are happy that the employment levels in South Africa have now surpassed the pre COVID-19 level.

We acknowledge that unemployment particularly among the youth and women in South Africa remains the biggest challenge and that if allowed to continue unabated it may hinder our nation's prospects to achieve a demographic dividend. To address this, we have implemented several public employment programmes, which primarily target young people and women. These include, the youth cooperatives and entrepreneurs skills training and the Youth Employment Service programme to stimulate job creation and create quality work experiences for unemployed youth. This initiative is a business-led collaboration that we established together with private sector partners.

Distinguished delegates,

We recognise that Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) is key to addressing gender equality and women's empowerment and are therefore approaching SRHR from a reproductive justice and human rights perspective. As part of our national efforts to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes for young people, we have just completed the development of our National Sexual and Reproductive Justice Framework Strategy for approval by Cabinet and we have also introduced

Comprehensive Sexuality Education as part of the school curriculum with the aim of equipping adolescents and teenagers with the relevant skills, knowledge, and proper understanding of their own sexuality.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, we still have more to do in tackling unacceptably high levels of gender-based violence and femicide in our country. To confront this crisis head-on we have together with civil society organizations developed a comprehensive NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE & FEMICIDE (NSP-GBVF) for tackling all forms of violence and abuse against women and children including femicide in our country. We have introduced the Gender-Based Violence Command Centre (GBVCC) which operates a 24hrs 7days a week Call Centre facility. The facility employs social workers who are responsible for call-taking and call referrals and also provide psychosocial support services for victims and survivors of violence and abuse.

Lastly Chairperson,

It is important to note that the progress has been unequal. There is a need to leverage North-South and South-South partnerships through initiatives like Partners in Population and Development South-South and Triangular Cooperation. This will undoubtedly help us accelerate achievement of the PoA. South Africa once again reaffirms our commitment to the ICPD PoA as well as the Addis Ababa Declaration and its principles. We continue to strive to be a constructive partner in realising the vision put forward in Cairo in 1994, ensuring that no one is left behind on our journey towards a more peaceful, equitable, just, and sustainable future for all.

I thank you.