



Office of the
**Secretary-General's
Envoy on Youth**

Statement

Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth

47th Session of the Commission on Population and Development

9 April 2014

Mr. Chair,

Thank you for inviting me and providing me the opportunity to address this important commission at this very special and crucial session.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues and friends, in particular young people who are part of national delegations and those representing youth organizations and networks, including those of you who are in the overflow room,

Good morning,

It's an honour and pleasure to be with you today.

ICPD PoA and Beyond 2014 Review

The Programme of Action agreed to at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, along with the benchmarks added at the ICPD+5 review, was a milestone in articulating a vision for the relationships between population, development and individual well-being.

In doing so, it made the needs and rights of adolescents and youth a central priority by setting key objectives and actions, including in the areas of education, employment, health -including sexual and reproductive health-, and participation.

The Cairo Programme of Action is one of our most important internationally agreed paths to a better future for the world young people deserve. This very same commission recognized and reaffirmed as much, by adopting its landmark resolution on the theme "Adolescents and Youth" during the 45th session of the CPD, just two years ago.

Now, at the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the ICPD Programme of Action, what we have learned and what lies before you this week, -distinguished delegates- is the evidence and findings gathered from the comprehensive, multi-stakeholder review that was mandated by General Assembly Resolution 65/234.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to UNFPA for leading the review process in a most inclusive manner and for its efforts to ensure that young people's voices have been provided ample space throughout the process, and at all levels, also to recognize the role of UNDESA and the regional commissions in supporting the regional forums in the lead up to your commission.

I was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to attend some of the ICPD Regional Conferences, and their respective pre-conference meetings with youth and civil society; I participated in Cairo, Geneva and Montevideo and I followed closely other regional forums. Just yesterday, a group of the youth delegates present here handed to me a petition outlining their call for protecting human rights and dignity.

During these occasions, young people shared with me their concerns and aspirations for the future, - which turned out to be remarkably similar across different regions of the world.

What I present to you today, both echoes the key demands and priorities emanating from the manifold of those youth voices, and builds on evidence-based findings that the review has generated.

General overview

With half of the world population under 25 years of age, the world is going through important demographic transition, coupled with socio-economic and democratic transitions in many countries around the world.

Given the large proportion of adolescents and youth in the populations of many countries, how well young people navigate the transitions to education, employment, independence, participation, becoming active citizens and staying healthy, will determine not only the course of their lives, but their countries' broader socio-economic development as well.

Yet, and despite the compelling evidence of the importance of young people to countries' prospects for development, the review findings emphasize that investments in adolescents and youth are lagging behind.

Many young people continue to experience limited access to quality education, health services, decent work and opportunities to participate in society. Therefore, urgent efforts are needed to protect, promote and fulfill the human rights of young people.

Education

Mr. Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

The story of education has been one of many faces.

While there have been significant gains in access to primary education, which have

particularly benefitted girls, there are many issues related to the quality of education across regions and within countries.

Education is costing more and in many cases equipping young people with less relevant skills to a constantly changing market. Secondary education remains a challenge for girls in many regions due to gender discrimination.

Improving the quality of the formal and non-formal educational system should be a priority for ICPD Beyond 2014 as well as the post-2015 development agenda.

Strengthening the education system and tackling inequalities is fundamental in unleashing the potential of young people.

Employment

In seeking the transition from education to the labor market, Young people are overrepresented among those unemployed, in informal employment, and in insecure, poor quality and low paid jobs.

Youth comprised nearly 40% of the 197 million people unemployed in 2012 and more than 75 million young people are still unemployed.

Let's remember that youth unemployment is not about numbers only; it's about the psychological damage for this generation. I warn of a lost generation if we don't do more.

A lost generation is a lost opportunity, and would be the biggest gamble we make with our future.

Creating employment opportunities for youth is a critical challenge as 600 million jobs need to be generated globally in the life span of the new development agenda to absorb current unemployment levels.

However, despite the enormous challenges, this is a unique time and a historic opportunity to build a brighter future for us and the generations to come.

It's imperative that governments and the private sector respond to the youth unemployment crisis. It's also imperative to support young entrepreneurs, those who decided to become job innovators, not only job seekers.

Gender equality

The ICPD Programme of Action put forward a concrete agenda for ensuring women's and girls' empowerment and to address gender inequality. Yet, adolescent girls still face multiple discriminations due to their gender and their age, putting them at serious risk.

It is for instance, unacceptable that an estimated one-third of girls in developing regions are married before their 18th birthday.

It is equally unacceptable that girls' human rights are violated by harmful practices like female genital mutilation.

Or that girls who are coming-of-age are taken out of school, because their safety from violence on their way to- and from school, as well as within the schools themselves, cannot be guaranteed.

I therefore support the calls made in the ICPD Beyond 2014 global report for targeted efforts to enable girls to stay in school, delay family formation, prevent child marriage, keep them free from violence, including sexual violence, so they can develop their life skills and reach their full potential.

Moreover, as the review report notes, investing in adolescent girls doesn't only benefit the girls themselves, but also their families, communities and countries, now and in the future.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

One of *the* most defining feature of the ICPD Programme of Action, lays in its recognition of the centrality of sexual and reproductive health and its related rights, to people's individual well-being and to development in general.

Human rights include young people's right to have control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence, - as the 2012 CPD resolution stated.

Yet, there are still many barriers that hinder the access of adolescents and youth to sexual and reproductive health services.

Laws and policies often restrict the access of young people to such services.

Many health providers remain judgmental and lack the skills to work with young people with respect, sensitivity and confidentiality.

This lack of progress has directly contributed to some of the disturbing figures presented in the ICPD global report:

- More than 15 million girls age 15 to 19 years give birth every year, noting that a significant proportion of adolescent pregnancies result from non-consensual sex
- Adolescent birth rates are highest in poor countries, and in all countries they are clustered among the poorest and least educated, compounding the risk of poor health outcomes for both mother and child.

- 41% of all new HIV infections worldwide occur in young people.
- Rates of unsafe abortion in adolescent girls and young women are extremely high.
- And pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among 15-19 year old girls in low- and middle-income countries.

These negative health outcomes all point to the urgent need to ensure that young people everywhere, whether in- or out of school, and in particular adolescent girls, have access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services, including access to contraception.

Comprehensive sexuality education that emphasizes gender and human rights, from an early age and in keeping with their evolving capacities, is essential for young people to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy, HIV and sexually transmitted infections; to promote values of gender equality, mutual respect, tolerance, and non-violence; and to plan their lives and develop lifelong healthy behaviours.

Participation, governance and accountability

Mr. Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

Today's youth are more connected and tuned in to the world than any generation before. They are growing up fast, in a world that is changing even faster. Fortunately for all of us, young people see the challenges before them in fresh ways and are responding with enthusiasm and imagination.

With the right investments, young people everywhere can reach their full potential as individuals, leaders and agents of progress. They have the potential to transform the

social and economic fortunes of their communities, particularly in least developed countries and the world clearly needs their energy, their participation and their skills.

If we are to learn anything from the events of the past few years, it is that this generation demands to be heard in all decision making processes at all levels. Autonomous, inclusive youth participation structures should be established and strengthened.

It is critical to involve young people in the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and actions for which they are the intended beneficiaries.

Closing

In conclusion, we must recognize the enormous potential of the largest generation of young people in history, and their contributions as active citizens towards sustainable development.

Because youth are not only a demographic fact, they are the biggest asset and opportunity!

The call for respect for human rights and economic and social justice from young people across the world has never been stronger.

Young people are not asking for support, but they are asking for investment!

Such investments empower them to navigate their life transitions safely, develop their human capital to its fullest potential and participate in efforts to deliver a world of equality, opportunity and human rights for all.

In the days ahead, I urge you to be bold and concrete in your deliberations and recommendations, taking into account the overwhelming evidence the ICPD Beyond 2014 review has generated.

Let's ensure that the ICPD Beyond 2014 will help today's and future generations of young people not only to survive, but to thrive.

I thank you very much