



United Nations Population Fund

48th session of the Commission on Population and Development

Opening remarks of

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, UNFPA Executive Director

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Madam Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning! Let me begin by saying how pleased I am to acknowledge the presence here of so many Government officials joining us from your capitals, representatives of civil society, including youth organizations, whose efforts are so pivotal in implementing the ICPD agenda, transforming lives and securing our environment for future generations.

The bureau of this Commission, under the leadership of Ambassador Frankinet, has done a magnificent job in preparing this session and I would like to express our gratitude to them.

Let me also thank Under-Secretary-General Wu for the partnership with UNFPA in supporting the work of this Commission.

Madam Chairperson,

Last year was a landmark for the ICPD, a time of reflection, of celebration, of reaffirmation and of firm resolve to do better. This Commission and world leaders at the Special Session in September affirmed the mandate of the ICPD Programme of Action and the actions for its follow up beyond 2014.

They recognized that the ICPD's timeless principles and commitments are prerequisites for sustainable development that delivers for all.

As we design a new post-2015 development agenda, this CPD, by integrating population issues into sustainable development, can turn that reaffirmation into reality.

By ensuring that the inextricable link between human rights and development is firmly rooted in the new development paradigm, we can jumpstart achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure that no one is left behind.

By unleashing the power of people, enabling them to exercise their rights and catalyzing all people's contributions to collective sustainability, we can advance dramatically towards realizing the dignity and human rights of all.

Investing in Young People for Sustainable Development

Getting it right for young people will be critical. Investments in the rights and well-being of adolescents and youth, now and throughout their lives, will unleash a demographic dividend of inclusive, sustainable economic growth in many countries, as they see larger numbers of young working age people relative to children and older persons. In our interconnected and globalized world, this dividend will pay off for all.

Realizing this potential requires a powerful commitment to health, and in particular to ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights throughout the life course.

We need to empower young people, especially adolescent girls, to make informed decisions, have control over their bodies and stay healthy.

We need to empower young women to delay fertility, prevent adolescent pregnancy, stay in school and find jobs that provide security and well-being.

Empower, educate, employ!

Women and girls must be free from the threats of maternal mortality, gender based violence and harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. And they must have the opportunity to decide on the number and timing of their children.

As the ICPD Beyond 2014 review showed these interventions can have enormous development benefits. But it also showed that the wealthiest populations account for much of the progress we have seen. Those who are poor, living in rural areas or urban slums, those experiencing discrimination and marginalization, continue to be vulnerable to denial of rights and to exclusion from social and economic opportunities.

To extend sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights to all and bring about the undeniable development returns of a healthy population, we need to invest in strengthening health systems to deliver high quality services. And we need to invest in the infrastructure – roads, water, energy – that make stronger health systems possible and accessible.

We need to address head on the systemic gender inequalities that hamper women's empowerment, their health and their options in life, and that prevent redress when their human rights are violated.

And we need comprehensive sexuality education, which empowers young people to make responsible, autonomous decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

CSE that emphasizes gender and power reduces rates of sexually transmitted infections, HIV and unintended pregnancy and enables young people to stay healthy. This promotes gender equality, mutual respect, tolerance and non-violence. It helps young people plan their lives and develop lifelong healthy behaviours.

Madam Chairperson,

Half of all non-communicable diseases can be attributed to behaviours that begin in childhood and adolescence, such as tobacco use, alcohol use, unhealthy diets or lack of physical activity. Reaching young people, both in and out of school, early in life to foster positive life-long health behaviours is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of health and well-being for all.

Investing in the health, education and employment of young people today is the best investment to improve the lives of older persons tomorrow.

Delivering on the rights and aspirations of young people will set the stage for a second demographic dividend of ageing, as we live longer and healthier, enjoy our grandchildren – and great grandchildren – while society shares and benefits from our prosperity.

Acting Now

The global challenges we now face have been decades in the making. It will require a long-term approach to address them. We must begin now.

This year, over 59 million girls will turn 10 years of age. That's another 59 million chances to do it right, to catalyze the dramatic transformations they – and we – so desperately need.

We can't afford to wait until next year, the next CPD, the next generation. These investments take time and resources. And although we know they will bring enormous returns, those too take time to see. There are always more immediate issues to address – other "priorities". Time and time again, these have taken precedence.

How many girls have we let down over the years? Let us not tell the next girl, the next generation of girls, that they are next in line to be let down for the pursuit of other priorities.

Let us not continue sacrificing the precious potential of tens of millions.

If we do, we will find ourselves in 2030 with inequalities widening, innovation stagnating, and still no closer to achieving sustainable development.

Let us take a different path. Let us make the necessary investments in young people that you committed to during the ICPD review. Let's not have the same conversations 15 years from now that we are having today.

Addressing Challenges: Inequality, Fragility, Climate Change

We face a highly unequal world, where so many have been left out. Investing in the rights and prospects of all people is the only way to address these inequalities and ensure that growth is inclusive and durable.

We face enormous fragilities and vulnerabilities – more people than ever displaced by conflict, and weak systems and infrastructure that leave too many places at risk of collapse when crisis strikes.

Climate change impacts will continue to grow, driven in large part by ever-increasing consumption and our reliance on fossil fuels. The climate agreement that we hope will be signed this year in Paris can help mitigate this threat if we can implement it in synergy with the sustainable development goals.

The poor and marginalized are least equipped to cope with climate change impacts. They need our support to build lives and livelihoods that are resilient, flexible and adaptable.

Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights is a recipe for resilience. When these rights are not protected, too many women and girls enter a spiral of early marriage and early pregnancy that severely limits their options and those of their households. This undermines their ability to reduce their risk before a crisis, cope during and recover after. And evidence shows that gender-based violence escalates and services disappear during crisis, meaning women and girls are doubly vulnerable.

Robust health systems and the ability to ensure rights and services across the humanitarian-development continuum are key to resilience.

Population Dynamics and Data

Amidst uncertainty and in search of new prospects, more and more people are moving internally and internationally, especially to urban areas, driving one of the largest demographic transformations we have ever seen.

By 2030 the world will have 1 billion new urban residents, primarily in Africa and Asia. Migration and urbanization can catalyze new forms of growth, resilience and sustainability, greater access to services and opportunity, and more equal development. But this will only happen if we recognize and plan for where people are and where they will be.

The field of population provides incredibly robust projections that enable us to do just that.

Today we can look back at the Programme of Action and marvel at how well we could predict 20 years ago the population of today. Yet our projections, our understanding of the population, are only as good as the data that go into them.

We need to significantly increase investments in data and statistical capacity, so we can leverage census, survey and administrative data to plan for and monitor people-centred sustainable development.

We also need to leverage the data revolution. Rapid advances in big data and analytics can enable us to better identify and support those most in need, who may be lost in traditional data systems and aggregate statistics – young people who are moving to cities in vast numbers, and those too often forgotten or excluded, including women and girls, older persons, the poor and marginalized, internally displaced persons and refugees.

National Statistical Offices have always been a crucial partner in the implementation of the ICPD and its data-driven mandate. As we face the challenges and opportunities of planning and monitoring the Post-2015 development agenda in a much broader and more integrated way, ICPD will continue to provide a framework for using data to guide us to sustainable development and to assess our progress honestly and transparently.

Integrating Population Issues into Sustainable Development

Last year at this Commission, and in September at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly devoted to ICPD beyond 2014, Member States reaffirmed the ICPD as a guidepost for sustainable development.

This year, let us recognize ICPD beyond 2014 as a means of achieving and monitoring many dimensions of the Post-2015 agenda. The new development agenda is broad, ambitious and diverse

because it reflects the tremendous challenges we face and the goals we must reach. Integrating population issues into it, as you are called to do here, will enable us to build on lessons learned from 20 years of ICPD, on the nature of our population now and in the future, and most of all on the achievement of dignity and human rights for all.

Let this next generation of young people be the first to grow up with all of their rights realized -- empowered, educated, employed and deployed as drivers of a better future for all of us.

We have 59 million chances to get it right.

If we do so, we will be well on our way to sustainable development.

If we do so, by 2030, today's 59 million 10-year-old girls will be 25-year-olds living with their brothers in dignity, equality, health and well-being.

We can't afford to wait. The time is now. Let's make it happen.

Thank you.