

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**OPENING REMARKS
BY
MR. SHA ZUKANG
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE 2012 UN CONFERENCE
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RIO+20)**

Delivered

by

**MR. JOMO KWAME SUNDARAM
ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

At The Forty-Fifth Session Of The Commission On Population And Development

New York, 23 April 2012

Ambassador Hasan Kleib,
Ambassador Marjon Kamara,
Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin,

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

It is my pleasure to join you today.

Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, is away from New York and cannot attend this important meeting. He has asked me to deliver this statement on his behalf.

In our work in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, we are reminded every day of the linkages between population trends, economic development, and poverty reduction.

The Commission's focus this year, on adolescents and youth, is particularly timely.

Rapid population increases, combined with the largest number of young people the world has ever known, challenge countries' ability to end poverty and hunger, achieve universal education, and improve maternal and child health.

The ICPD Programme of Action is, therefore, just as valid today as it was 18 years ago, when it was adopted.

Its objective -- to fully integrate population concerns into development strategies -- should be on our minds as we approach the Rio+20 Conference in June.

This week, negotiations resume for what the Secretary General has called one of the most important conferences in UN history.

And we should not miss the chance to fully integrate population challenges into the outcome document, just as in Agenda 21.

The same applies to the post-2015 UN development agenda. Population issues are critical.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me take a moment to briefly touch on current trends in youth demographics.

The number of adolescents and youth, while larger than ever, will remain stable in the foreseeable future.

This is an achievement. It means that a larger share of young people may be able to access schooling, health care and employment than in the past.

Yet, these global trends hide important regional variations.

In Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of young people aged 12-24 is projected to fall by some 10 per cent by 2040.

In developed countries, the number of young people will drop slightly as well.

But in Africa, the number of adolescents and youth will increase by 60 per cent over the next 30 years.

This rapid growth will impact opportunities. It can exacerbate unemployment, poverty, and access to health care for young people. It can pose greater challenges to national development strategies.

But, the consequences also have a positive side. This new generation of young people – with their energy, zest and talent – is a tremendous resource that can transform the globe. But we must do our part to ensure they have the opportunity to realize their potential.

Excellencies

This week you will assess implementation of the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development.

This includes its key actions with respect to adolescents and youth.

These commitments have lost none of their urgency. They remain a crucial underpinning of efforts to meet the internationally agreed development goals.

Less than two years ago, in September 2010, the international community reaffirmed its resolve to work together to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Member States recalled their promise to enhance opportunities for young people in numerous ways. These included employment and decent work, access to information, and choice regarding the widest possible range of safe, effective and affordable methods of family planning.

Yet, today, far too many young women desire to limit or space their births, but cannot do so.

Further, far too many young men and women cannot find the employment they seek. And far too many cannot receive the education they deserve.

Fortunately, in the face of these challenges, the Commission's evidence suggests a number of ways forward. To name a few:

- 1) Supporting adolescent girls to continue their education is crucial. It reduces the incentive to marry and bear children at a very young age.
- 2) Programmes on sexual education and HIV prevention deserve full support. They provide young people with the knowledge and skills to engage in responsible sexual and reproductive behaviour.
- 3) Special efforts should be made to provide family planning services to young women and men. Sexual and reproductive health services should be an integral part of the health-care package offered to adolescents and young people.
- 4) Considering that poverty and unemployment often lay at the root of social problems, Governments should foster decent work opportunities for young people.

During its forty-fourth session last year, this Commission made a number of concrete recommendations aimed at improving the lives and well-being of young people, on which this session can build.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In two and a half years, the General Assembly will renew its political support for achieving the goals and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action.

Ahead of this even, we look to you to identify effective ways by which the international community can meet the needs and aspirations of young people today, and in the future.

In closing, let me express DESA's appreciation to Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin, and his colleagues at UNFPA, for the fruitful collaboration in implementing the international agenda on population and development.

It is through combined efforts that our work will reach its full potential.

I wish you much success in your deliberations.

Thank you.
