

Canada

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
VÉRIFIER AU PRONONCÉ**

**STATEMENT BY
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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

TO THE UN COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

NEW YORK, 24 APRIL 2012

**DÉCLARATION DE
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A LA COMMISSION DE LA POPULATION ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT

NEW YORK, LE 24 AVRIL 2012

Canadian Statement to the 45th Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development

Mr Chairperson,

I thank you for this opportunity to address the Commission on Population and Development.

This year's theme, "adolescents and youth," is particularly relevant to the current development agenda. It is estimated that there are 1.2 billion adolescents in the world, forming around 18 per cent of the global population. They represent the greatest source of potential for the future, yet they also face some of the most pressing development challenges. Our shared responsibility is to ensure that young men and women have access to relevant, quality information and services to guide them safely through life decisions and to participate fully and equally in the development of their communities.

As the Secretary General reports, many adolescents today are healthier, are staying in school longer, and are entering the labour force at a later age. Young women are also more likely to delay marriage and childbearing. Yet, for millions of adolescents and youth, access to basic education and skills remains a challenge, deaths due to communicable diseases are still too many, large numbers of young women are married before the age of 15, and maternal morbidity and mortality for young women remain unacceptably high.

Supporting children and youth to become productive members of society is a priority for Canada. In 2009, the Canadian International Development Agency announced its strategy of *Securing the Future of Children and Youth*. This Strategy focuses on three key pillars – improving child survival, including through reduced maternal mortality; improving access to quality education, with a special emphasis on girls; and ensuring the rights and protection of children and youth, particularly girls, from violence, exploitation and abuse.

In 2010, Canada used its G8 leadership to champion the *Muskoka Initiative on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health*, which supports and advances access to comprehensive health care and services in developing countries. We are pleased with the global momentum to improve health outcomes and acknowledge the progress that is being made. Yet, these efforts remain threatened by persistent gender inequality and discrimination against girls and women.

For example, young women aged 15-19 are still twice as likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth as their peers aged 20-24. To improve maternal health, harmful traditional practices like early marriage must be eliminated. In addition, access to comprehensive, quality reproductive health care and services for women and girls must be ensured.

Canada continues to be a strong supporter of programs to address HIV and AIDS. Canada has made important contributions worldwide through support to many partners, including developing country partners, civil society organizations, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and UNAIDS.

The Government of Canada is also working to improve the health of youth in Canada. The Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada seeks to prevent the spread of the infection, slow its progression, and improve the quality of life of people living with HIV and AIDS including at-risk youth. In September 2010, Canada's Ministers of Health endorsed the *Declaration on Prevention and Promotion and Curbing Childhood Obesity: A Federal, Provincial and Territorial Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weight*, a critical first step in helping Canadian children and youth live longer, healthier lives. As well, in 2009, the *Cracking Down on Tobacco Marketing Aimed at Youth Act* was passed to ban the use of flavourings in cigars, cigarettes and blunt wraps. Minimum package sizes for these products have also been established to make them less affordable to youth

Canada has a long-standing commitment to ensure that girls, boys, young women and young men have equal access to quality basic education. Ensuring that adolescents – particularly adolescent girls – can remain in school through primary and into secondary school is a key concern for Canada. We know that with every additional year in school, girls are more empowered to delay marriage and pregnancy, reduce their risk of contracting HIV, and reap the social and economic benefits of their enhanced skills and competencies.

Canada is also strongly committed to addressing the learning needs of out of school youth, through literacy and skills development. When they gain these basic competencies, adolescents and youth are more likely to access critical health and social services, make responsible decisions, participate effectively in the workplace and contribute meaningfully to society. These efforts are especially important for young men and women in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Canada recognizes that investments in health, education and other sectors cannot yield sustainable improvements in the lives of children and youth if protection and security issues are not addressed. To help meet its Securing the Future of Children and Youth Strategy objectives, Canada is working to ensure that countries have the legal frameworks necessary to protect children and youth; that more children and youth, particularly girls, are protected from violence and abuse; that schools are safe and appropriate environments for learning; and that youth gain opportunities to become productive and engaged members of their societies.

Canada recognises that indigenous communities around the world face challenges in ensuring that all youth can benefit from development. The socio-economic situation of indigenous children and youth in particular requires continued action through enhanced partnerships between different levels of government, indigenous peoples and other stakeholders across many social and economical issues.

Mr. Chairperson

Canada is committed to eliminating gender inequalities and supporting the empowerment of girls and young women. The Government of Canada, in partnership with other countries, proudly championed the establishment of October 11th as the UN International Day of the Girl. This day will foster awareness of the specific risks faced by girls and encourage countries to promote and protect girls' fundamental human rights.

To conclude, achieving the internationally agreed development goals is a shared responsibility that requires continuous attention, sustained partnerships at all levels and above all, the active and equal participation of women and men, girls and boys. The implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action is a key strategy to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and ensure a better future for children, adolescents and youth.

Canada looks forward to working with the Commission on Population and Development to advance the agenda of the ICPD and to examine our collective progress and remaining challenges.

Thank you.