

MALTA



**Statement by H.E. Mr. Christopher Grima
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations
45th Session of the Commission on Population and Development
Agenda item 4 “General debate on national experience in population matters:
Adolescents and Youth”
United Nations, New York, 24th April 2012**

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to begin by congratulating you on your Chairmanship of the 45th Session of the Commission on Population and Development and to wish you and the other members of the Bureau a successful meeting.

Our consideration this year of the theme ‘Adolescents and Youth’ is timely particularly in view of the rapidly changing environment in which we are living and the changes stemming from globalization and an ever interconnected world. Today’s adolescents and youth represent the first “digital” generation - a revolution that has allowed adolescents and youth to widen their horizons further and faster than the previous generation, providing them with new opportunities but also unexperienced challenges.

The global economic downturn has also confronted today’s adolescent and youth population with new uncertainty requiring national governments to give particular focus to this segment of society. Also with this in mind the Government of Malta has enacted the National Youth Policy for 2010-2013, a policy formulated with the direct contributions of Government Ministries, entities and other stakeholders, including of course youth and adolescent organisations and structures. My delegation would like to highlight just a few of the Policy’s priorities.

The Government of Malta believes that the key to success and development of adolescents and youth lies in education. Primary and secondary schools with new educational facilities have been developed all over the Maltese Islands to cater for a modern education. The Government of Malta has also continued to give priority to tertiary education by strengthening the University of Malta so that it can offer an ever increasing range of courses, as well as welcome an increasing number of full-time and part-time students. It is the firm view of the Government that education is a basic right of every child, irrespective of sex, race, disability or belief.

A National Youth Agency was established in February 2011 with a view to implementing and coordinating Malta’s National Youth Policy. From the outset, the National Youth Agency set itself two primary and interrelated tasks. The first related to internal matters involving the establishment of effective and efficient administrative structures and operational procedures for the agency. The second focussed on developing and implementing initiatives and programmes to address and help meet young people’s needs and aspirations.

Mr. Chairman,

Malta also prides itself on its high level of health care, free of charge, to all residents in Malta. We believe that a healthy life incorporates the physical, mental and social well-being of the individual – essential elements for young people’s success and prosperity. To this end, the National Youth Policy stipulates the need for tailored health strategies that take into account the specific nature of young people in terms of age, gender, disability and socio-economic situation together with the provision of support structures in the health care system focusing on young people. It also provides for youth-friendly services within the health care system such as specialised clinics responsible for health promotion, health education, immediate treatment in schools and non formal spaces run by multi-disciplinary teams including nurses, youth workers and counsellors, to also enable adolescents and youth to attain the highest level of sexual and reproductive health through the provision of specially tailored programmes and healthcare as outlined in our Sexual Health Strategy launched last year.

Mr. Chairman,

At the same time, Malta continues to reaffirm that any positions taken or recommendations and reports made on sexual and reproductive health, rights, services and commodities should not in any way create an obligation on any party to consider abortion as a legitimate form of reproductive health, rights, services and commodities. Indeed such positions, recommendations and/or reports are to be considered in accordance with the outcome of the International Conference on Population and Development and its Programme of Action, including the reservations registered at the ICPD as well as the reservations at subsequent International Conferences and this Commission.

My delegation requests that Malta's position is included in the records of the proceedings and outcome of this Commission meeting. Malta also reiterates its request that this position be taken into account in the preparation of similar future reports and is fully reflected on the website of the Division on Population and Development.

Mr. Chairman,

The ancient Greek physician Hippocrates said that “sport is a preserver of health”. The Government of Malta has implemented a policy through which local sport facilities are upgraded and maintained to a high standard, providing local sport facilities to the benefit of the community, especially adolescents and youth. Sport makes an important contribution and essential ingredient in the quality of life of young people, including as a promoter of active citizenship by enhancing team-building, values of fair play and leadership skills. It is also a means of cultivating a society that is physically and mentally healthy.

The Government of Malta has also given priority to information and communication technology. Adolescents and youth today have the best opportunities for their future employment as well as education at their fingertips through the use of the internet and other ICT technologies. In a world in which communication times have shrunk to the time-scale of milliseconds, the Government of Malta has implemented a nation-wide policy to upgrade ICT infrastructures to the highest standards. Every class room in state schools, both in primary and secondary schools, is equipped with computers and the introduction of electronic black boards is also progressing at a quick pace.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to conclude with a final thought on the environment and its relationship to adolescents and youth. Malta recognizes the need for sustainable development which is also achieved through youth participation in preserving and protecting the environment. Disregard for the environment can compromise for future generations opportunities available to today’s adolescents and youth. A healthy environment is in our view an important framework within which adolescents and youth are secured a strong and prosperous future.

Thank you.