

Statement by the United States  
at the 45<sup>th</sup> UN Commission on Population and Development

Delivered by:

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Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the United States, I thank you and the bureau, as well as the Population Division and UNFPA, for your collective efforts to prepare us for the work of this year's Commission on Population and Development (CPD). This year's theme, adolescents and youth, is critically important for all of us and for future generations.

The Program of Action adopted by 179 governments at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, and reaffirmed in many intergovernmental negotiations since then, recognizes that for women and young people to realize their full potential, they must be able attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. The ICPD Program of Action sets forth the rights, policies, programs and enabling conditions that young people need to successfully navigate the period between adolescence and adulthood. Yet 18 years after Cairo, these goals have not been fulfilled for many among the world's largest-ever generation of youth who are now reaching the age of sexual activity and reproduction.

The United States supports the actions of governments, international organizations, and civil society groups to bridge the gap between the ICPD

agreements and reality for many of today's adolescents and youth. We do so because the health, development and human rights of youth must be a high priority in their own right. Today's young people are maturing earlier, both physiologically and socially, in a rapidly changing world. Ever increasing numbers have access to media, including social media, through which they get enormous amounts of information, both accurate and inaccurate. Many are mobilizing in myriad ways to raise their voices on issues of national and global significance. They are here with us, on delegations and as advocates, ensuring they have a meaningful voice in deliberations that may have a profound impact on their lives.

But, negative forces still affect young people's lives, particularly with respect to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. In this decade, 100 million girls are at risk of early and forced marriage. Millions of girls and young women face female genital mutilation and other harmful practices. More than 40 percent of all new HIV infections are in young people aged 15-24, with young women outnumbering young men due to intergenerational and transactional sex. Many girls and young women, as well as some boys, are subject to sexual coercion and violence.

Too many adolescents lack access to comprehensive sexuality education which helps develop skills they will need to successfully negotiate relationships, and can help promote gender equality, human rights and lifelong good health. Nor do many have ready access to health services, especially sexual and reproductive health services, due to restrictive country policies, the attitudes of health providers and social taboos. These factors, along with poverty and lack of educational opportunities, make young girls vulnerable to a range of negative health outcomes,

including unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortion, obstetric fistula, cervical cancers, and even death.

We also know that too many young people are vulnerable to multiple exclusions and discrimination, especially girls and young women in humanitarian or other crisis settings, youth who are homeless or living with only one or no parent or guardian, young people orphaned by or living with HIV and AIDS, adolescents and youth in marginalized groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth, young people with disabilities, those in rural areas and urban slums, youth who migrate alone, and youth from indigenous or disadvantaged communities.

Clearly with over 40 percent of the world's population under the age of 25 we must increase efforts to meet the needs of adolescents and youth and secure their healthy transition to adulthood. In particular, working in partnership with young people, we need to support and provide education at least through secondary school; make comprehensive sexuality education available for all adolescents and youth, both in and outside of schools; ensure that health services, particularly sexual and reproductive health services, are accessible to them; and promote and protect their human rights.

The Obama Administration is taking strong and clear action to support our global health commitments. The focus of the President's Global Health Initiative is to build and strengthen health systems in-country, supporting long-term, systemic changes that remove the economic, cultural, social, and legal barriers to quality health care services for women and young people, including sexual and reproductive health care services. Our goal is for women and children to have

access to an integrated package of essential health services. And the initiative seeks to increase the participation of women and girls in health care decision-making, especially as it pertains to reproductive health including family planning.

While much remains to be done, the Secretary General's reports to the Commission show significant strides have been made in improving some aspects of youth development in recent decades. We still need to expand access to sexual and reproductive health services while also increasing attention to other health issues of major importance for youth: alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse, unsafe sex, unsafe driving, violence, and mental health problems. These threats to overall health and well-being often begin in adolescence and can have life-long negative consequences that can affect participation in education, employment, and civic and family life. Early, evidence-based prevention programs specifically for youth are known to be effective, as is frank discourse on sexual health and reproduction.

And, finally, in the run-up to Rio+20, or the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development that will take place this June in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, young people again have much at stake. Collectively, young people have a critical role to play in adapting to a changing environment, holding their governments accountable to pledges made in Rio, and shaping a just and sustainable world. An effective approach to sustainable development must support young people's sexual and reproductive health and their human rights as part of a comprehensive response.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, we look forward to productive discussions with other delegations on these vital issues. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently noted, "When young people can claim their right to education and health – including sexual and reproductive health – they increase their opportunities to

become a powerful force for economic development and positive change.” Our deliberations can have a significant impact on adolescents and youth themselves, on the achievement of the ICPD and the Millennium Development Goals, and on the future of our world. Governments and the United Nations system, working together with young people, can make possible a healthy transition to adulthood for all adolescents and youth. This is the foundation they need to become empowered world citizens and on which world peace, justice and prosperity depend.

Thank you.