

**Statement to the Thirty-Eighth Session of the
Commission on Population and Development**

By
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished Delegates,

During this week, the Commission will discuss two very important topics. The overarching one is the contribution that the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development can make to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. The special theme focuses on HIV/AIDS, poverty and development.

As you know, the series of United Nations conferences and summits held during the 1990s set out an ambitious development agenda that provided the foundation for the United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted by the General Assembly in the year 2000. Next September, a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly will conduct the first five-year review of progress made in the fulfilment of all the commitments contained in the Millennium Declaration.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is a key player in this process, since it provides substantive secretariat support to all the functional commissions in charge of assessing and reviewing the follow-up to the major United Nations conferences and summits in the social and economic fields. The Department is also a major partner in monitoring progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and in disseminating information regarding the indicators of that progress.

The review of progress made in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action that the Commission conducted last year together with its deliberations this year on how such implementation can contribute to the achievement of the universally agreed development goals will provide key inputs for this year's High Level Segment of ECOSOC on "achieving the internationally agreed development goals". In addition, through ECOSOC, the Commission's input will also inform the debate in the high-level meeting of the General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

It is clear that full implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation would contribute significantly to the achievement of the main development goals. In fact, the ICPD goals on reducing maternal mortality, reducing infant and child mortality, ensuring universal access to primary education to boys and girls, and achieving gender equality and women's empowerment are all

included in the Millennium Declaration and reflected in the Millennium Development Goals and their associated targets.

Since people's well being is the goal of development, population trends condition development prospects. The ICPD Programme of Action underscores the importance of those trends and recognizes that, in developing countries where population continues to increase, slower population growth would improve the ability of countries to adjust to future population increases, to combat poverty, to protect and repair the environment, and to set the conditions necessary for sustainable development. Full implementation of the Programme of Action would contribute to slow population growth by reducing fertility levels especially in countries where women report having more children than they want.

Scholars agree that reducing fertility not only slows population growth but leads to a favourable age composition, where the number of potential workers increases relative to that of children and the elderly. Furthermore, as fertility declines, the labour force participation of women increases, providing a boost to the number of workers. These changes produce a context beneficial for economic growth, provided that jobs can be created fast enough for the growing population of working age. Such a "demographic bonus" has contributed to the rapid economic growth of a number of industrializing countries in Asia and it has been linked to a reduction of poverty in those countries. However, in countries where the creation of employment has not kept pace with the increases in the working-age population, poverty levels have not declined. This is the case in several Latin American countries. In addition, poverty remains a major challenge in most of the countries where fertility remains high, especially among the least developed countries and in most of Africa.

The ICPD Programme of Action offers useful guidance regarding actions that can lead to the achievement of key development goals. However, its implementation has not advanced equally in all countries or in all regions. Every year, 11 million children die before their fifth birthday and during the 1990s reductions in child mortality have often been slower than in previous decades, particularly in the poorer countries. Maternal mortality continues to be unacceptably high, especially in the least developed countries. Every year, over half a million women die needlessly of pregnancy-related causes; deaths that could be prevented by improving pre-natal care, access to trained birth attendants and referrals to emergency obstetric care. Lastly, AIDS continues to take its devastating toll and over 3 million people die annually of the disease.

Since the United Nations adopted the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS in 2001, the epidemic has continued to expand. Both rich and poor countries are being affected by the pandemic, the hardest hit countries are among the poorest in the world. The prevalence of HIV in the least developed countries is nine times that of the more developed countries. Currently, over 40 million people are living with HIV, at least 25 million of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. By placing heavy economic and social burdens on families and households, and eroding inter-generational support systems, AIDS reinforces poverty. The increasing number of infected men, women and young people is threatening food and agricultural production. The disease is also straining

resources in the health and education sectors, impeding human development in countries that need it the most.

In 1994, the ICPD Programme of Action was one of the first documents adopted by the international community that recognized HIV/AIDS as a global threat to health and development. Five years later, in 1999, as the epidemic continued to worsen, the key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action included for the first time a quantitative goal for the reduction of the spread of HIV. It called for a 25 per cent reduction of new infections among young people by 2010. But action to attain that goal was slow in coming and many countries still face a growing epidemic. Clearly, the Millennium Development Goal of halting or reversing the spread of HIV is crucial for the development prospects of many countries. The international community's success or failure in meeting this goal will profoundly affect the ability of many countries to reach other development objectives. In this respect, full implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action has much to contribute to help reduce the spread of the disease, particularly by ensuring that people get the information and means to protect themselves against contagion.

Today, and with good reason, concern over HIV/AIDS ranks high in the policy agenda of the majority of countries in the world. In response to the epidemic, most Governments have implemented programmes focusing on HIV prevention. These programmes include a variety of strategies, ranging from information, education and communication campaigns to voluntary counselling and testing. Programmes often target high-risk groups or those most vulnerable to the risk of infection, including women and young people. Experience indicates that programmes are most effective when tailored to the specific risk factors and situations prevalent in each country. For instance, in Brazil, Thailand and Uganda, very different but highly effective responses to the epidemic have been implemented. However, fighting the spread of HIV demands constant vigilance and sustained effort. Effective prevention programmes to reduce mother-to-child transmission of the disease, for instance, are still far from being universal. In addition, more has to be done to expand access to antiretroviral treatment for those already affected by the disease.

Given these major challenges, it is all the more important that in June of this year a high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS is scheduled to take place to review the progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. The deliberations of this Commission will be an important input to that meeting.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, you will consider over the next few days some of the most critical issues stalling development and perpetuating poverty in the world. I wish you every success in finding common ground to move ahead in effectively addressing these challenges. Mr. Chairman, I am confident that under your expert guidance and with the help of your Bureau, the meetings of this session of the Commission will proceed smoothly to a successful end.