



PRESS RELEASE

World leaders reaffirm their commitments to placing people at the centre of development and consider new population challenges

UN General Assembly special session examines 20 years of actions taken by governments to improve people's lives and address population issues

New York, 22 September—Heads of State and other Government representatives gathered for a UN General Assembly special session today to mark the 20th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, and to reaffirm their commitments to placing people at the centre of development.

The special session centres around a 20-year review of the implementation of actions agreed at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994. The Cairo conference was a watershed moment in the history of the debate about the relationship between population and development. The conference achieved a remarkable consensus among 179 UN Member States and others that the rights and well-being of individuals should be the central focus of efforts to promote social and economic development.

“The world agreed in Cairo that when women and girls get the education they deserve, societies are more productive,” UN secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said. “When their rights are protected, societies are more just. And when they are empowered to determine their own future, societies become stronger.”

The conference produced a Programme of Action that emphasized the importance of protecting human rights, especially those of women and youth, investing in health and education, advancing gender equality and empowering women, and ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. These actions were seen as central to expanding opportunities for all and crucial for sustainable development.

Now twenty years later, world leaders reviewed progress made and new challenges, and recommitted themselves to achieving the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action.

Great achievements since Cairo, but progress remains unequal

With the Programme of Action, governments set out an ambitious agenda to deliver inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. Progress since 1994 has been remarkable in many areas, including gains in gender equality and advances in educational attainment, health and survival, human rights protection and poverty reduction.

The availability of safe and effective contraceptives and access to reproductive health care, including family planning, have been instrumental in reducing fertility levels. As fertility has continued to decline, population growth has slowed. Fewer people are living in extreme

poverty, and more people are living longer, healthier lives. More girls are in school. Fewer women are dying in pregnancy and childbirth. There are more laws to protect and uphold human rights.

Yet many of the promises of the ICPD remain unfulfilled. Progress has been unequal, and often hampered by discrimination and inequality.

“We must confront the fact that some 800 women still die each day from causes related to pregnancy or childbirth,” Mr. Ban said. “An estimated 8.7 million young women in developing countries resort to unsafe abortions every year. They urgently need our protection.”

In addition, new challenges have emerged, including those linked to rapid urbanization, environmental change, economic transformation, and increasingly complex migration trends. The emergence of new flows of refugees and displaced persons demands greater efforts to ensure the security and dignity of all.

New population shifts and challenges emerge for future development planning

The world population increased from 5.7 billion in 1994 to 7.2 billion today. By 2050, it is projected to reach 9.6 billion, with most of the future growth concentrated in Africa and Asia. More than half of the world’s population now lives in urban areas. International migration has increased in size, scope, complexity and impact over the last 20 years. At the same time, the world’s population is growing older as the number of younger people stabilises. Older persons are the world’s fastest growing age group.

Cairo’s goals and objectives align with new development agenda

People are at the heart of sustainable development. As Member States reviewed policy priorities for the post-2015 development agenda, population issues were widely acknowledged as central to sustainable development. The special session on ICPD comes at a critical moment as the international community is in the final stages of preparing the new development agenda that will guide development efforts after 2015.

The special session marks the beginning of the final year of negotiations before a summit in September 2015, when world leaders are expected to adopt an ambitious, long-term agenda to improve people’s lives and protect the planet for future generations.

“We must renew our pledge to protect people – especially women and girls – as we strive to eradicate extreme poverty, protect the rights and dignity of all people and secure the future of our planet for generations to come,” Mr. Ban said.

For more information on the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014, visit:

http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/other/4/special_session.html

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