



Check against Delivery

**United Nations Commission on
Population and Development**

A World Fit for all Ages

Statement

by

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Commission, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address the opening of this fortieth session of the Commission on Population and Development.

Let me begin, Mr. Chairman, by commending you and the members of your Bureau on your work to prepare this session. We at UNFPA look forward to working closely with you and Member States on the issues before the Commission.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to my dear colleague and friend, José Antonio Ocampo as he leaves the UN. I have found in Jose Ocampo great support for our common mission to implement the Cairo Programme of Action. It has been a privilege for me to work closely with him especially through the Population Division, the Statistics Division and the Commission. I am grateful for his friendship and support and UNFPA looks forward to continued and strengthened collaboration with DESA and with its new leadership.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognise the important collaboration that UNFPA has with the Population Division and we look forward to continuing this with Hania Zlotnik and her colleagues.

Mr. Chairman,

It is important that we continue to move forward with the collective wisdom that population and development is about people of all ages and supporting them, throughout their life cycle, to improve their lives, reach their full potential and realize their human rights.

It is important that we hold firm to the commitment that it is only by addressing the issues of population, reproductive health and gender equality that we will be able to achieve the international development goals, specifically the Millennium Development Goals.

Our collective work towards achieving the goals and recommendations of the ICPD Programme of Action will contribute to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development. The achievements of greater socio-economic development in the poorest countries will depend to a large extent on the success in addressing population and development issues.

Today, I would like to focus on two issues for which reports have been submitted to the Commission. The first is the changing age structures of populations and their implications for development, and the second is the flow of financial resources for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

Changing Age Structures

Let me begin by focusing on changing age structures. As the reports point out, a shift in age structures is occurring across the world. There is not one country or region that is exempt and the implications are substantial. Indeed, if we look around, we see the world population moving in many directions. This brings many benefits but also just as many challenges.

The world today is home to the largest population of young people and the largest population of persons aged 60 years and over. Today, the elderly are the world's fastest-growing population group. And just as there is an economic divide between the developed and developing regions, there is also a demographic divide.

In the more developed regions, population growth is stagnant overall, and the population is ageing rapidly. In fact, the population aged 60 and over is expected to nearly double by mid-century. In Europe, for example, just 16 per cent of the population is under the age of 15. This stands in stark contrast to the least developed countries where there is rapid population growth, large youth populations and slower population ageing. In Africa, 41 per cent of the population is under the age of 15.

Since changing age structures affect all aspects of a society's social well-being, much greater attention needs to be paid to understanding demographic and age structures and incorporating this analysis into national policy frameworks including sector-wide approaches and poverty reduction strategies and in the allocations of national budgets. Inadequate attention to demographic changes may lead to inefficient social investments.

UNFPA is committed to bringing the analysis of age structure transitions into national development discussions within United Nations country teams and with national government partners and other development stakeholders.

UNFPA together with other UN agencies, support the development of capacities of countries to collect, analyse and disseminate population data and statistics disaggregated by age and sex, so as to inform evidence-based policy dialogue, development planning and programme formulation.

Mr. Chairman,

Recognising that there is a window of opportunity that opens during the demographic transition, when there is a large number of working people with relatively fewer dependents to support, it is important that the right basic social and economic policies are in place. This allows the demographic bonus to result in higher economic growth and development.

So, needless to say, there is much to be gained by planners and policymakers taking a hard look at population's age structure and dynamics. As they calculate their spending, officials need to know how many and what percentage of their population are young, in their prime working years, and how many people are older. Countries will need to respond to the new realities revealed by changing age structures with appropriate policies and programmes to meet the needs of all groups in society without compromising on the rights of individuals to decide for themselves the size and timing of their family.

Together we must work towards a world fit for all ages.

The challenge is to meet the needs of the young, the working age and the old, especially the education and health needs of young people, the employment needs of the working age population, and the social, medical and financial support of the elderly.

Mr. Chairman,

The large youth populations in the least developed countries deserve our urgent attention and priority, and with good reason. The current bulge in the youth population presents an unprecedented opportunity for growth and transformation depending on the choices that governments make.

Today young people are living in a rapidly changing world - a world characterized by increased mobility, instantaneous communication, and increasing urbanization. Very often it is also a world of poverty, gender discrimination, armed conflict, human rights abuses or situations where there is little opportunity or hope for a better life.

The point I want to make is that if we are to stand any chance whatsoever of achieving the development goals and building a better world for all, we must reach out to young people. And we must do so urgently and with open arms. We must embrace them as partners in progress. This is critical in all countries, but it is especially critical in the least developed countries, where their prospects remain limited and choices for a better life, are few. What we do with and for young people now is what we will get when they become older people.

Investing in young people's education, health including their sexual and reproductive health, and employment and promoting their social and political inclusion will yield large returns now and for generations to come.

Today I call on governments to make greater investments in young people, and especially adolescent girls, so they can pass safely to adulthood. Increased investments are needed so young people can protect themselves against HIV infection and unplanned pregnancies, early marriage, sexual abuse, violence and exploitation. The opportunities and choices that young people have will determine our common future.

In order to demonstrate the importance of investing in young people and their healthy transition to adulthood, UNFPA is pleased to be co-organizing, together with the Swiss Government and the Guttmacher Institute, a side event on this topic tomorrow.

Mr. Chairman,

As I said earlier,

Today population ageing is well advanced in Europe and parts of Asia. Many governments are currently re-examining their policies recognizing the valuable and important contributions the elderly make - which many times cannot be quantified in economic terms. Indeed, older persons not only provide a valuable social safety net in many communities but also their experiences are invaluable in preparing the future work force.

UNFPA seeks to ensure that the elderly, especially elderly women, are not forgotten and that their needs including their sexual and reproductive health needs are adequately met. Aligned with the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, UNFPA encourages countries to incorporate the issues of older persons in national development frameworks and poverty reduction strategies. UNFPA also encourages the involvement of older persons in the decision-making process. And UNFPA works to bridge the generation divide between the young and old through support for intergenerational dialogue, understanding and solidarity. I firmly believe that more dialogue between generations will build a strong society for all ages.

ICPD Financial Flows

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to turn now to the issue of financial flows for the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action. The good news is that the flow of resources for population assistance is on the rise. However, I would like to caution that even if estimates and projections hold and the financial targets are surpassed, the resources mobilized will not be sufficient to meet current needs, which have grown dramatically since the targets were agreed upon in 1994.

At that time, the population and health situation in the world was much different from what it is today. For one thing, no one had foreseen the escalation of the AIDS pandemic, from 14 million people living with AIDS in 1994 to 40 million people today. Since 1994 health care costs have increased substantially while the value of the dollar has gone down.

As a result, the ICPD financial target of \$18.5 billion in 2005 will not be sufficient to meet current developing country needs in the areas of family planning, sexual and

reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, and basic research, data and population and development policy analysis.

For example, there is a large funding gap between what is needed and what is currently being mobilized for family planning. In fact, donor assistance for family planning as a percentage of all population assistance has decreased considerably since Cairo, from 55 per cent in 1995 to 9 per cent in 2004. In dollar terms this is from \$723 million in 1995 to \$442 million in 2004.

The victims of this funding gap have been poor women in poor countries who cannot exercise their reproductive rights and plan their families. It is a serious problem that needs to be urgently addressed. Today there are 200 million women in the developing world with unmet need for effective contraception. The result is increasing numbers of unwanted pregnancies, rising rates of unsafe abortion, and increased risks to the lives of women and children.

Mr. Chairman,

The benefits of reproductive health care including family planning cannot be overstated. We will not attain the Millennium Development Goal, especially MDG 5, if we do not ensure universal access to reproductive health. Sexual and reproductive health is essential to women's empowerment and gender equality. Family planning is key to maternal and child health. It is estimated that ensuring access to family planning alone would reduce maternal deaths by 20 to 35 per cent and child deaths by 20 per cent.

One of the key messages here is that if not reversed, the trend towards less funding for reproductive health will have serious implications for the ability of countries to address unmet need for such services and could also undermine efforts to attain universal access to reproductive health by 2015.

The bottom line is that money invested in sexual and reproductive health services will be repaid many times over in direct savings on other health and social services. It will also promote economic growth, poverty reduction and gender equality, and will help to fight the economic and social devastation caused by HIV/AIDS. These benefits will come in addition to the gains in healthier lives and reduced human suffering that cannot really be quantified.

Today I call on countries to increase investments for all areas of the ICPD population package including in support for reproductive health commodity security.

And in closing, I would like to reiterate that to have a healthy and productive ageing population we must ensure that we have a healthy and productive young population. Together they will make development of societies a reality.

I thank you.