

**Joint Statement by the Federated States of Micronesia,
Solomon Islands, Tonga and Nauru**

**Fiftieth session of the United Nations
Commission on Population and Development
*“Changing Population age structure and sustainable development.”***

**United Nations Headquarters, New York,
5th April 2017**

Madam Chair,

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Federated States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands, Tonga and my own country Nauru. At the outset, allow me to offer our congratulations on your assumption to the chairmanship of the Fiftieth session of the Commission on Population and Development. Let me assure you of our support as you lead our work during this important session.

Madam Chair, we express our continued support for the full and effective implementation of the Programme of Action (POA) of ICPD held in Cairo. We applaud the POA’s holistic approach toward a very complex and politically sensitive issue. Furthermore, we note that the successful implementation of the POA will contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda. We are committed to achieving the ICPD objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to the full implementation of the SAMOA Pathway.

As such, we welcome the special theme of this session, “Changing population age structures and sustainable development.”

High rates of adult mortality and morbidity are a persistent problem in our region. At the same time, it is projected that ageing in the Pacific Islands will accelerate in the coming decades.¹ In preparation for upcoming changes in age structures, we will be particularly focused on caring for older persons and investing in youth.

With regard to older persons, our region is working to reduce risk factors that increase the prevalence of disease and to ensure that older persons have access to quality health care services. We are also committed to reducing poverty among older persons, including by creating more employment opportunities for those who want and are able to work.

¹ See 7.1 of <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/pacific/drive/Ageingpopulation20.10.10.pdf>.

It is essential to eliminate all forms of neglect, abuse, and violence against older persons. In our region, older persons are viewed with a great deal of respect and even veneration, and their care takes place primarily within the family.²

The family also has primary responsibility for nurturing our children. In the context of population ageing, investing in youth is of the utmost importance. We are fully committed to ensuring that our youth receive high-quality education and that there are good employment opportunities awaiting them upon graduation.

However, we believe that the most important investment we can make in our youth is in their character. Our youth will soon be leading our nations and facing significant development challenges; they will need virtue, integrity and character to face these challenges well. The moral formation of a child happens best in the context of the family, and we believe that both mother and father have a significant role to play in this regard.

Older family members also have much to teach our youth, and therefore these inter-generational bonds should be fostered. It is also precisely through the teaching of our traditional and faith based values that our youth have learned to respect and care for the elderly.

The family remains the central organizing unit in our societies. This tradition remains strong even as many of the forces of globalization conspire to weaken the family unit. It is therefore critical that policies designed to achieve sustainable development in the context of changing age structures focus on strengthening and protecting the family. This must include respecting the different religious and cultural conceptions of the family that each country chooses for itself.

In our region, especially, we experience the world as full of uncertainty—economic, political, and environmental. The one constant for us - the one thing that allows us to thrive amidst the challenges we face - is our identity: our heritage, our faith, our values, our culture. Therefore, it is critical that international development assistance not be contingent on ideological colonization or imposition of ideas that are contrary to our core societal values. Imposing an external social agenda disrespects our autonomy, deprives us of the opportunity to chart our own way forward, and can become a dangerously destabilizing force in our communities.

As we prepare for changing age structures, we are also mindful of the challenges we face in light of population growth. We affirm holistic approaches to overcoming these challenges, such as ensuring access to quality education, including age-appropriate education related to family planning, strengthening family structures, reducing the number of teenage pregnancies, and providing meaningful employment opportunities for all.

² *Id.* At 5.7.

We would like to make clear that we do not view the promotion of abortion as a means of achieving sustainable development. We want to remind the Commission that the promotion of abortion as a method of family planning is contrary to the ICPD, and that it is also a great departure from long established religious and societal norms in some of our countries, and this dynamic must be respected.

Finally, Madam Chair, we would like to call on the UN system to provide support in building capacities and ensuring adequate and sustainable financing for achieving sustainable development in the context of changing age structures.

We acknowledge the primary responsibility of our Nations for their own sustainable development. However, the persistent development challenges of SIDS require enhanced global partnership and greater access to the Means of Implementation (MOI). This cooperation can be transformational for our countries if pursued in the spirit of mutual understanding of our challenges and respect for our differences.

Thank you.