



**United Nations Fiftieth Commission on Population and  
Development  
New York, USA  
3-7 April 2017**

**Statement Delivered on behalf of the World Health Organization**

Madam Chairperson and Distinguished Delegates,

It is my honour to present this statement on behalf of the World Health Organization.

The World Health Organization recognizes the crucial role of sexual and reproductive health and rights in ensuring the health and well-being of populations and in the achievement of sustainable development, and welcomes the focus of the fiftieth session of the Commission on Population and Development on changing population age structures and sustainable development.

We welcome the Secretary General's report on changing population age structures and sustainable development and on monitoring population programmes, with the focus on changing population and age structures. As noted by the Secretary General in his report, it is important for countries to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including family planning, in accordance with the objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We particularly welcome the emphasis on investments in women's and girls' empowerment, including for promotion of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and quality education for adolescents as critical to harness the demographic dividends in societies.

Improved sexual and reproductive health is a key pillar of the overall health, empowerment, and human rights of individuals and of the sustainable and equitable development of societies. Ill-health from causes related to sexual and reproductive health, including too many, too early and too frequent pregnancies, remains a major cause of death and disability among women and girls, particularly among the most vulnerable, marginalized and underserved. Poor sexual and reproductive health contributes significantly to poverty, thereby limiting socio-economic development. Conversely, achieving sexual and reproductive health empowers individuals and communities to participate in economic development.

Honourable Chair, the WHO co-sponsored Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction, HRP, realizes the centrality of issues that the report highlights. HRP, as the lead entity within the UN system for research, research synthesis and capacity strengthening for sexual and reproductive health, responds to the evidence needs of all countries, but especially low and middle income countries by identifying evidence gaps and generating knowledge, testing innovative interventions to improve health systems efficiency and equity, and evaluating mechanisms for delivering evidence-based interventions sustainably at scale through implementation research. HRP commits to continuing to deliver the much needed evidence base for supporting national policies, programmes and health care delivery across the life cycle for accelerated progress in universal access to reproductive health and advancing the ICPD and SDG agenda.

We stand at crossroads: how we address the inequalities and injustices faced by populations both young and ageing in fulfilling their right to access sexual and reproductive health services will

determine the extent to which peoples' lives are improved everywhere. Specifically, the ability of societies to harness the dividends of demographic transition and create an improved paradigm of health, dignity and wellbeing for the current and next generations of women, children and adolescents will be determined in large part by their willingness to invest sufficiently in ensuring the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people and throughout their lives. Respect for sexual and reproductive health and rights in the context of rapidly changing population and age structures has been globally recognised as central to implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; we stand ready to support countries through making available the best possible evidence to guide the transformations needed to ensure national health systems can ensure universal health coverage, whatever the population's age structure.

I thank you Chair.