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Opening statement at the 51st session of the
Commission on Population and Development
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Mister Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to address the Commission on Population and Development at the opening of its 51st session.

The discussion of global population change often focuses on four so-called megatrends: population growth, population ageing, urbanization and international migration. These global megatrends are critically important in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as each is both a cause and a consequence of other major development processes.

Depending on the year, the special theme of the annual session of the Commission on Population and Development tends to focus on one or more of these four megatrends. Last year, a primary focus was on population ageing. This year, we turn our attention to urbanization and international migration.

In the limited time available, I will not attempt to summarize the content of this year's theme: previous speakers have done a good job of that already. Rather I wish only to point out that the Commission has an important opportunity this year to demonstrate its relevance as an expert body of the Economic and Social Council. In choosing this

year's theme, the Commission was responding to the call by the General Assembly for Member States to contribute to the preparatory process of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, as one of the United Nations bodies with a mandate to address migration-related issues (A/RES/71/280, paragraph 22b). This Commission has been challenged in recent years to achieve consensus around a resolution on its special theme. This year, by keeping a focus in the negotiations on the theme itself and by working together closely in a spirit of collaboration and compromise, I feel certain that the Commission will achieve a successful result for its current session.

Dear delegates,

As you know, the Commission's primary mandate derives from the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994 (A/RES/49/128). The Programme of Action includes two chapters on migration: one on internal migration and urbanization and another on international migration.

Consistent with its mandate as an expert body that examines population issues, the Commission has considered topics related to internal and international migration periodically since 1994. Of the 24 special themes chosen for the annual sessions of the Commission from 1995 until today, five have contained the word "migration", including the theme of the current session. This observation underlines the fact that migration has been one of the leading topics on the agenda of the Commission over the past quarter century. By comparison, the words "urbanization" and "cities" each appear just once in the themes of the Commission since 1995.

The special themes of the Commission over the past two and a half decades reflect the diversity of topics addressed in the ICPD Programme of Action. An attractive feature of the Commission's mandate is that it is intertwined with all three dimensions of sustainable development: social, economic and environmental. Indeed, ever since the writings of Thomas Malthus in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, population issues

have been framed, at least in part, as questions about the sustainability of current human activities, taking into account the current size and characteristics of the population, as well as the anticipated trajectory of population change.

In 2016, you may recall that the Commission undertook a deep reflection on its methods of work. One of the key issues was the role of the 2030 Agenda versus the Programme of Action from Cairo in providing the mandate for the work of this Commission. It is worth recalling that there was, overall, a strong reaction against the suggestion that the 2030 Agenda might become the primary focus of the Commission's work. Rather, in a resolution first agreed within the Commission and then adopted by the Economic and Social Council, it was decided that the Programme of Action of the ICPD would continue to provide the primary mandate for the work of the Commission, and that the Commission's contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda would take place within its existing mandate (E/RES/2016/25, paragraph 2).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Like the Commission, the Population Division recognizes the need to review and reform its structure and working methods, in order to maintain and improve the relevance, timeliness and quality of its work. Last year, an external evaluation of the Division's implementation of the 2016-2017 work programme provided some evidence to confirm the good reputation of the Population Division and the high demand for its various publications and datasets. The evaluation also identified some weaknesses in the Division's approach to completing its work programme. The weaknesses, as noted by the consultant, are all within our power to remedy and can be addressed with some rather simple, common-sense reforms.

Thus, the results of both the external evaluation and an internal review have guided the development of a proposal for the internal restructuring and reform of the Population Division. The main intention of the proposal is to improve the Division's capacity to complete its programme of work in a timely manner, to improve the sustainability and

efficiency of key work streams, to enhance the quality, relevance and dissemination of its outputs, and to enable the Population Division to service more effectively the Commission on Population and Development and other intergovernmental processes.

I will gladly share some more information about the Population Division's proposal for restructuring and reform on Thursday morning as part of agenda item 4 on the future work of the Secretariat in the field of population. As we reflect on the challenges ahead, I invite you to express your views under that agenda item on how the Population Division can improve its work and strengthen the support provided to Member States.

Mister Chairperson,

In closing, I wish to thank you for your leadership in steering the preparatory work of the Commission in its 51st session. Your personal commitment to convening and leading two rounds of consultations by regional group has been critical. Those consultations brought Member States together for early and frank discussions around the special theme for this year and have helped to set the right tone for the deliberations taking place this week.

The consultations also provided a mechanism for the Secretariat and UNFPA to receive early inputs from Member States about how to frame, and how not to frame, the discussion on the special theme. Such inputs were extremely valuable as we worked to prepare the reports of the Secretary-General and other documents that are helping to shape the discussions of the 51st session.

I hope that, over the next year, as we approach the 25-year anniversary of the Cairo conference in 1994, we will continue to reflect on how this Commission can contribute effectively to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, while maintaining a clear focus on its primary mandate from the ICPD Programme of Action.

Thank you, Mister Chairperson.