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UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Opening Remarks

Fifty-second session of the Commission on Population and Development

New York, 1 April 2019

*Delivered by Ms. Maria-Francesca Spatolisano,
Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs*

Your Excellency Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Chair of the 52nd session of the
Commission on Population and Development,
Your Excellency Ms. Inga Rhonda King, President of the Economic and Social Council,
Deputy Secretary-General Ms. Amina Mohammed,
Under-Secretary-General Ms. Catherine Pollard,
UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem,

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to welcome you to this fifty-second session of the Commission on Population and Development. The presence of many senior officials today signals a strong and enduring commitment to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo 25 years ago, and to the ongoing work of this Commission.

Allow me also to congratulate Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem on the occasion of UNFPA's 50th anniversary. For half a century, UNFPA has been the leading agency supporting the implementation of the Cairo agenda, in particular by promoting advances in sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and by helping countries to build a global infrastructure of population data that are essential for monitoring progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

On behalf of DESA, I also wish to thank Dr. Kanem and her colleagues for many years of excellent collaboration in supporting the work of this commission.

Distinguished delegates,

Nowhere have the connections between population, poverty alleviation, sustained economic growth and environmental sustainability been more clearly articulated than in the Programme of Action from the 1994 conference. The Cairo conference called for integrating

population into programmes on development and the environment, taking into account patterns of production and consumption, and seeking to bring about population trends that are consistent with the achievement of sustainable development and improvements in the quality of life.

As a testimony to its forward-looking nature, many of the goals and objectives contained in the Programme of Action were reflected, first, in the Millennium Development Goals and, later, in the Sustainable Development Goals. Indeed, as highlighted in the theme that you have chosen for this year's session, implementing the Programme of Action from Cairo is making an essential contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The High-level Political Forum, to be held in July under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, will provide an important opportunity for Member States to articulate the interlinkages between population and sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Much has been achieved since the time of the Cairo conference. To name just a few:

- Global life expectancy at birth has risen by seven years;
- Total fertility has dropped from 2.9 to 2.5 births per woman;
- The child mortality rate has fallen by more than half; and
- The annual growth rate of the world's population has declined from 1.4 to 1.1 per cent.

These trends are part of a process of demographic transition that has touched all populations of the world.

Population growth is caused by a decline in the death rate and is thus an important sign of human progress. As the birth rate continues to fall, the speed of population growth will continue to decline.

As growth slows down, populations also grow older, with an increasing share of older persons. Like population growth, population ageing is fundamentally a sign of human progress. But we must also recognize the consequences of these major population shifts and seek to address them as part of our development planning.

In addition to population growth and population ageing, two other demographic megatrends are shaping our world in fundamental ways: international migration, and urbanization. These trends affect the spatial distribution of populations and are linked in various and complex ways to the process of sustainable development.

Distinguished delegates,

While it is right to celebrate our achievements, we must also prepare for a world with a population that will be larger, older, more mobile and more urbanized than ever before. The timing of these population shifts varies across countries, and there is also a wide variety of experiences with international migration. While guided by internationally agreed principles and

recommendations, the particular circumstances of countries also influence their approach to population policies, as part of their overall development planning.

In DESA, we will continue to promote a clear and fact-based understanding of population issues. But we cannot do it alone. We count also on governments and other partners to gather the appropriate data, conduct the necessary analysis and promote an informed public discussion of these matters, which lie at the heart of sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The draft political declaration put forward by the Chair captures what binds us together: the need to accelerate implementation of the historic plan on population and development. Indeed, it is important to continue striving for consensus around the many important topics addressed by this Commission and their importance to the 2030 Agenda.

In closing, I wish you all the best in your deliberations this week and look forward to a successful outcome.

Thank you.
