

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

**OPENING REMARKS TO THE COMMISSION
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

New York, 1 April 2019

[As prepared for delivery]

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
UN system colleagues,
Friends from civil society,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of a landmark achievement in global cooperation: the adoption of the far-reaching Programme of Action at the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994.

The Programme of Action provides a comprehensive review of the multiple linkages between population and development.

The conference also consolidated a major shift in the global discussion of population issues towards a greater emphasis on the rights, equality, dignity and well-being of individuals as they experience life's vital events, including birth, death, marriage, childbirth and migration. The Programme of Action has had remarkable staying power, and remains today a living document, able to guide us as we strive to achieve its goals alongside those enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

From a global perspective, that work gives us much to celebrate.

Since 1994, fewer persons are living in extreme poverty, the risk of maternal death has declined by more than 40 per cent and primary education has expanded the horizons of millions of people.

But there are gaps in implementation, and many challenges remain.

Our efforts on some Sustainable Development Goals are not keeping pace with population growth. When we look at targets on poverty in the least developed countries, or on child

marriage, or people living in urban slums, while the percentage of affected persons may be declining, their number is still rising.

Progress has also proved uneven. Globally, women's demand for family planning is increasingly being met by the use of modern contraceptive methods. Yet, in 44 countries, less than half this demand is being met, and in many countries we are seeing past gains eroded by a push back on women's rights.

It is time for the world to show greater ambition and urgency around SDG implementation that is fully aligned with the Cairo Programme of Action.

First, we must put gender equality at the core of each and every SDG intervention – whether in the social, economic or environmental realms, and whether in the work of government, business or civil society.

This includes engaging women and girls as agents of change, not merely as beneficiaries. It includes providing the means for women to make decisions that affect their bodies and lives, and which experience proves will benefit themselves and their families, communities and nations.

This also includes efforts to realize reproductive rights.

As we look ahead to the high-level discussion on Universal Health Coverage in September of this year, let us identify the steps and the resources needed to ensure coverage for all, including sexual and reproductive health care and services.

Second, we must do much more to deliver universal access to quality education, in particular for young girls. For every additional year of schooling a girl attains, the chances of early childbearing decrease, and with it lessened maternal mortality, fewer children, and greater lifetime income to combat poverty.

We have ample evidence of what works to keep students in school, including cash transfer programmes, credit for the poor and school lunch programmes.

In particular, we must increase our investments in secondary and tertiary education; this is especially important in the least developed countries where enrollment rates remain low.

We also need a revolution in quality standards to prepare young people for the economy of the 21st century, including continuing education for teachers themselves and access to technology and skills needed for the economy of the future.

Third, we are in a race against time to make the systemic adjustments needed to avert major changes in the earth's climate, which threaten lives and livelihoods, especially in coastal areas.

Population increase and economic growth have brought an enormous increase in global production and consumption, with important consequences for the environment. The Cairo conference gave early and prescient attention to these risks and to the need for sustainable development.

We must always remember that the world's poorest are facing the most severe impacts of climate change, even though they have contributed the least to its underlying cause.

The Secretary-General is convening a Climate Summit in September to raise ambition across the board – on mitigation, adaptation and financing. He and I count on your strong support and readiness to participation with solutions and commitments.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The International Conference on Population and Development and other summits and conferences of the 1990s laid a solid foundation for the 2030 Agenda.

Today, I call on all Member States, including members of this Commission, to recognize and reinforce the critical contributions that the Cairo agenda can make to the achievement of the SDGs.

In practice, this means ensuring that the demographic situation in each country is reflected in national development policies and planning, and that the findings and conclusions of this Commission inform the reviews of progress on the SDGs taking place in the High-Level Political Forum later this year.

In that spirit, I wish you every success in your important deliberations.

Thank you.