



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on Population and Development

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**General debate on national experience in population matters:  
realizing the future we want — integrating population issues  
into sustainable development, including in the post-2015  
development agenda**

### **Statement submitted by Women Deliver, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Invest in girls and women: everybody wins**

Imagine a world where no woman dies giving life, where no baby is born with HIV, where every girl is able to attend school and receive a quality education, and where everybody — including girls, women and young people — has the opportunity to live to their full potential. That world is within reach — if we want it.

Right at this moment, a truly universal and transformational course is being set, changing the world as we know it and as we want it. United Nations Member States are negotiating the final parameters of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. Drivers such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are being revisited, reviewed, and reframed, and the world is reflecting on progress and ongoing challenges. We must make sure that the new development framework benefits both people and planet, prioritizes the health, rights and wellbeing of girls and women, and that it includes sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

The past two decades have shown that it pays to invest in girls and women, and we have seen tremendous improvements in some areas. However, challenges remain, and progress has been uneven across regions and within countries.

Every day, 800 women still die during pregnancy or childbirth, with thousands more experiencing long-lasting injury or illness; 225 million women still have an unmet need for modern contraceptives, hindering their opportunities; many girls never finish secondary school; and for millions of women, access to finances, land and natural resources is still a distant dream.

Addressing these inequalities requires tackling the root of the problem: that girls and women are not seen as deserving of the same rights as boys and men. Discrimination and violence against girls and women reflect on rights abuses, but also significantly inhibit their full participation as healthy and equal citizens of their communities. If human rights are universal, then they must apply equally to both men and women.

Women deliver — and not only babies. They deliver for themselves, their families, communities, and nations. But to be able to do so they need good health services, including sexual and reproductive health. They need access to quality and continued education. And they need to be economically empowered. When they have these fundamental needs addressed, when they can exercise their human rights, women can deliver everything and the world will benefit from the tremendous untapped potential girls and women possess today.

Healthy, educated and empowered girls and women are at the heart of sustainable development and must be at the centre of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Without a focus on girls and women, the SDGs will not be reached. Simply put, girls and women are crucial for realizing a healthy, peaceful, and prosperous world.

This means that the needs and rights of young people must also be addressed in the Sustainable Development Goals. We owe it to them, and we owe it to ourselves. Young people are innovators, inventors, early adapters, leaders, and

change makers. Or, as the Secretary-General pointed out in his recent synthesis report on the post-2015 agenda, “Young people will be the torch bearers of the next sustainable development agenda through 2030.” They are the ones who can ensure that it will not be business as usual. And their opportunities, needs, and choices — including reproductive choices — will define development and help realize the future we want. And, there are many young people — 3 billion under the age of 30, 1.8 billion between the age of 10 and 24 years. They represent the biggest generation of young people ever. Which in turn represent billions of opportunities for progress, as we see it.

While we have seen tremendous progress since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was agreed 25 years ago, the world’s children and young people are still facing issues of violence, child marriage, trafficking, unplanned pregnancy, unemployment, and are denied their basic human rights, such as access to education, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. We know that putting an end to these challenges requires investment in adolescents and young people, especially their health, education, and employment. This is imperative, in order for them to lead the lives they want and contribute to society, but also for sustainable development more generally.

It is important to note that young people are not to be only passive recipients of investment. Young people are indispensable partners in development. It is crucial to ensure their voices are heard, they have a seat at the proverbial table, and are involved in the political processes — including the ongoing negotiations of the Sustainable Development Goals. Their needs need to be taken serious at all levels.

As we stand here at the Commission for Population and Development, with the experience of the ICPD Beyond 2014 review behind us, and the negotiation on a new development framework — the Sustainable Development Goals — in its final stages, the time is now to gather our shared experiences, replicate, and scale-up successful interventions, apply new technologies, and develop innovative processes and partnerships.

Investing in equal rights, economic empowerment, health and education for girls, women and young people is not only the right thing to do — it’s a smart investment in the future we want and a more equitable world for all.

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