



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on Population and Development

### Fiftieth session

3-7 April 2017

Item 3 of the provisional agenda<sup>1</sup>

**General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels**

**3(b) Special theme of the fiftieth session<sup>2</sup> of the Commission based on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation**

**Statement submitted by Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights and Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights and the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>3</sup>**

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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<sup>1</sup> [E/CN.9/2017/1](#).

<sup>2</sup> Changing population age structures and sustainable development.

<sup>3</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Changing Population Age Structures, Sustainable Development, and the Necessity of Ensuring Young People's Health and Rights**

The Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights and the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network, representing over a thousand organizations and individuals worldwide working to realize the full sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people, welcome the upcoming focus of the Commission on Population and Development on changing population age structures and sustainable development.

As previously noted by Member States at the 49th session of the Commission on Population and Development, population issues such as changing population age structures are inextricably linked with sustainable development. As such, they must be integrated into development planning and efforts, including those related to the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a particular focus on the needs of the poorest and those in vulnerable situations. Member States similarly affirmed that the promotion, protection, and respect for human rights must be mainstreamed into all sustainable development policies and programmes.

As organizations committed to the advancement of young people's rights and wellbeing, we call for next year's session of the Commission to fully account for the trends worldwide of increasing youth populations, with young people aged 10-24 comprising 1.8 billion of the world's population, 90 per cent of whom live in developing countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean, young people account for approximately one quarter of the region's population, making it the largest proportion of young people ever in the region's history. And yet when it comes to sustainable development, adolescents and young people remain among the most marginalized and affected by persisting inequalities, particularly regarding their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Many adolescents and young people:

- Live in regions where education and health systems are of poor quality and/or inaccessible;
- Are denied access to any existing sexual and reproductive health information and services, because of barriers such as marital or parental consent requirements, stigma surrounding youth sexuality, and negative attitudes from parents, teachers, healthcare providers or others;
- Face high rates of STIs and HIV, where the Caribbean is one of the regions most affected by HIV/AIDS worldwide, and yet less than 50 per cent of 15-24 year olds in the region know how to prevent HIV transmission;
- Are subjected to sexual and gender-based violence or early or forced marriage;
- Face high rates of early or unplanned pregnancy, where as a region Latin America and the Caribbean has the second highest 15-19 fertility rate in the world;

- Face unwanted pregnancies and resort to desperate and unsafe measures to end an unwanted pregnancy, risking their health and lives. Nowhere is the denial of young women and girls' health and rights more clear than in the rates of unsafe abortion among adolescents; where according to the Guttmacher Institute, in 2008 roughly 3.2 million adolescent women in the Global South underwent unsafe abortions, entailing an annual rate of approximately 16 unsafe abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-19. Latin America and the Caribbean, a region characterized by highly restrictive abortion laws, is also characterized by high unsafe abortion rates, of roughly 25 per 1,000 women aged 15-19.

Furthermore, because of gender stereotypes and an inequitable distribution of reproductive labour, many young women and adolescent girls are tasked with a greater amount of domestic and caretaking responsibilities, further restricting their ability to access health services when needed; their ability to continue formal education; and in turn their socioeconomic and political participation.

All of these realities entail extremely limited opportunities for young people to define their present and future lives, while denying their rights to health and development, education, safety, privacy, and bodily autonomy, among other human rights violations. Yet in spite of changing population age structures, young people and particularly adolescents continue to remain invisible at a policy level in most national and international contexts, entailing that laws, policies and programmes often fail to acknowledge let alone meet young people's specific needs.

The success of any sustainable development efforts, including those outlined in the 2030 Agenda under Goals 3 and 5, and those under regional commitments such as the Montevideo Consensus, hinges on fulfilling young people's human rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Moreover, any efforts towards rights-based sustainable development balanced across economic, social, and environmental dimensions, must not only address the above issues, but ensure the meaningful participation of young people in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes affecting their lives.

Governments have recognized and affirmed the centrality of young people to sustainable development and the importance of meaningful youth participation through a number of intergovernmental outcomes, including the 2007 World Programme of Action on Youth, the Commission on Population and Development Resolution 2012/1, the ICPD Programme of Action, its 20-year review, and the respective regional outcome documents of the ICPD beyond 2014 Review, including the Montevideo Consensus. Young people, moreover, have repeatedly shown a willingness, commitment and capacity to participate in policy-making processes, amplifying their voices and priorities through landmark documents such as the Bali Global Youth Forum Declaration and the Colombo Declaration on Youth. In these documents youth advocates have also emphasized the critical importance of recognizing young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights, both in terms of realizing other human rights, and their cross-cutting centrality in achieving social justice, women's and girls' empowerment, and sustainable development.

Last year at the Commission on Population and Development, Member States affirmed that health is a precondition for economic and social development. And as

recently stated by the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, “States should refrain from a selective approach to the right to health and related human rights when developing strategies towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and should ensure full compliance with human rights law and principles.”

As such, we recommend the inclusion of the following in the conclusions of the fiftieth session of the Commission on Population and Development:

- Uphold and accelerate the implementation of all sexual and reproductive health and rights-related commitments under the 2030 Agenda and the regional outcomes of the ICPD beyond 2014 Review, including in Latin America and the Caribbean the Montevideo Consensus and Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda;
- Ensure and expand the provision of comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including emergency contraception and safe and legal abortion and post-abortion care, that are accessible, affordable, confidential, and high-quality, free of marital and parental consent requirements;
- Create and ensure an enabling environment for the meaningful participation of young people, in all their diversity, in the design, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes that will affect their lives;
- Promote gender-sensitive sociocultural change to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of domestic work and care-related tasks among families, adolescents and young people;
- Prioritize the systematic and coordinated collection, analysis, and use of data disaggregated by age, gender, income, disability, location, and other variables, including the collection of data on adolescents between the ages of 10-14, in order to ensure the most vulnerable are represented, and strengthen effective policy development;
- As noted by governments worldwide in last year’s session, and regionally in the Montevideo Consensus, women’s, feminist, and youth organizations have played an integral role in the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action. As such, governments must ensure sustainable funding for women’s, feminist, and youth civil society organizations to continue their important work in the implementation and review of both the Cairo Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda, through concrete and capacitated funding mechanisms. Recognition of civil society organizations’ important work is not enough; as noted by regional feminist organizations at the XIII Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, civil society organizations need funding and sustainability to support their ongoing and critical work.