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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 session² 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 IPAS, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council³

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.

¹ [E/CN.9/2017/1](#).

² Changing population age structures and sustainable development.

³ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

IPAS, a global nongovernmental organization dedicated to ending deaths and injuries to women from unsafe abortion and advancing women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, views the fiftieth session of the Commission on Population and Development as a critical opportunity to affirm the centrality of human rights in the sustainable development agenda. We welcome the priority theme of changing population age structures and sustainable development — we are mindful that new demographic trends are changing our world and that changing demographic structures can complicate and exacerbate challenges associated with reducing poverty and inequalities between and within countries, delivering basic services and ensuring that no one is left behind. We also welcome the Resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council on 27 July 2016 regarding the future organization and methods of work of the Commission, wherein the Commission reaffirms the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and also “reaffirms the primary mandate of the Commission on Population and Development, derived from General Assembly resolution [49/128](#), in which the Assembly decided that the Commission would monitor, review and assess the implementation of the Programme of Action at the national, regional and international levels and would advise the Economic and Social Council thereon.”

The Programme of Action advances a rights-based approach to population and development policies, with a focus on ensuring health, empowerment and rights for all and rejecting coercion, violence, and discrimination. The Programme of Action, together with the Beijing Platform for Action and the Rio General Assembly resolution, commits to the protection of reproductive rights and the rights of all to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including access to sexual and reproductive health, free from coercion, discrimination and violence, and recognized the centrality of these rights to issues of population and sustainable development. Populations are collections of individuals, each with his or her own inalienable human rights, and we must ensure that we continue the work of the Programme and keep rights at the centre of our approaches to sustainable development and the challenges brought by a changing world.

The Sustainable Development Goals set the global agenda for sustainable agenda and rightly prioritized women and girls. Under the Sustainable Development Goal 3, to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, target 3.1 calls for a two-thirds reduction in maternal mortality to 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 births, based on the World Health Organization's latest estimate for the maternal mortality ratio globally of 210 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. A report by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2013 drew attention to unsafe abortion as a “leading cause of maternal deaths” and cautioned that “it is likely that the numbers of unsafe abortion will continue to increase unless women's access to safe abortion and contraception — and support to empower women (including their freedom to decide whether and when to have a child) — are put in place and further strengthened.”

While available data point to a global decline in maternal deaths, inequalities among countries, regions and within countries continue to be pervasive, with

women who are poor, young, or in other vulnerable circumstances suffering the most and most at risk. Young women in particular experience barriers to reproductive health care that make them more likely than older women to delay abortion, and later abortion carries a higher risk of death and injury. These barriers can include the high cost of services, lack of transportation and accessible facilities, partner influence, fear, stigma, and provider bias. Between 38 and 68 per cent of women treated for complications due to unsafe abortion are under the age of 20, according to a hospital records review from developing countries. Yet unsafe abortion is entirely preventable through ensuring women's access to effective contraception and comprehensive sexuality education together with safe and legal comprehensive abortion care — essential and cost-effective components of any strategy for reducing maternal mortality rates and achieving target 3.1.

Improved systems at the national level to record maternal deaths and identify their causes — including unsafe abortion — are required to improve measurement of progress toward this target and identify priority interventions. The global community has recognized access to safe, legal abortion as an essential intervention in a package of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services that should be available to all women regardless of age, ethnicity, gender identity, geographic location, marital status, race, religion, socio-economic status or migration status.

One of the ways that population age structures are changing is in growing youth populations in many countries. Adolescents in particular need universal access to youth-friendly and non-judgmental sexual and reproductive health services. Of the nearly 22 million unsafe abortions that occur in developing regions every year, 41 per cent occur among young women 15-24 years of age. In addition, adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence; interventions for adolescents therefore must include services to prevent and provide care to those affected by sexual violence, including access to emergency contraception and safe abortion. Young women and victims of violence are also more likely to need second trimester abortion services. Young women need access to services that respect their sexual and reproductive health and rights and their rights to confidentiality, privacy and informed consent.

Sustainable Development Goal 5 calls for achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Gender equality includes recognition of women's autonomy and capacity to make informed and independent decisions about their sexuality and reproduction through laws and policies allowing access to safe and legal abortion. Women's access to safe and legal abortion is as relevant to gender equality as women's equal access to education, employment, adequate food and housing.

Safe and legal abortion is not only an essential health service and fundamental human right — it is sound policy for promoting sustainable and equitable development for all without discrimination of any kind.