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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 Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), 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

### **Beyond Numbers: Rights, Equality, and Justice at the Centre of Sustainable Development**

The Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) is a Malaysia-based NGO that has been working since 1993 to advance women's and young people's rights, particularly their sexual and reproductive rights. We work with 80 partners in 21 countries across Asia-Pacific and the Global South.

We welcome the theme of the fiftieth session, "Changing population age structures and sustainable development". Demographic changes related to population age structures are key factors that impact development opportunities, and need to be considered in strategies to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Six out of ten people in the world currently live in Asia-Pacific,<sup>4</sup> making what happens here very important in determining the world's future. Currently, children and youth comprise 24 per cent and 16 per cent of the population respectively,<sup>5</sup> while 68 per cent of its people are of working age and 32 per cent are dependents.<sup>6</sup> The region simultaneously has the largest number of people over 60, at 489 million, and the largest number of young people, at about 670 million.<sup>5,7</sup>

The region's population growth is slowing down with a growth rate of 0.96 per cent per annum,<sup>8</sup> and is facing dramatic shifts in its population's age distribution (changes are happening over a compressed period of three to four decades compared to about a century in the West). Asia-Pacific has countries with some of the youngest and oldest populations globally. In most of its countries, working age people will be or are already the majority of its population,<sup>5</sup> even as the overall proportion of working-age population is already declining in some sub-regions.<sup>5</sup> This puts the region as whole, and some key countries in it, as poised to benefit from a demographic dividend if relevant policies and programmes — for quality education, health, and employment — are set up and implemented with public investments. At the same time, the pace of ageing in the region is faster than in others, except in Latin America and the Caribbean,<sup>5</sup> and the proportion of women in the older population brackets is increasing. These trends pose significant challenges and potential opportunities that need to be anticipated and managed.

Managing these demographic shifts using a rights-based perspective is particularly significant as Asia-Pacific faces deep inequalities across and within countries, with social exclusions and marginalisation marring human development

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<sup>4</sup> PRB. 2016 World Population Data Sheet. <http://www.prb.org/Publications/DataSheets/2016/2016-world-population-data-sheet.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup> UNDESA. World Population Prospects: Key Findings and Advance Tables: 2015 Revision.

<sup>6</sup> UNDP. Asia-Pacific Human Development Report; Shaping the Future: How Changing Demographics Can Power Human Development. New York, 2016. <http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/hdr.html>.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCAP. 2016 ESCAP Population datasheet. <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SPPS%20PS%20data%20sheet%202016%20v15-2.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> UNESCAP. Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2014. <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ESCAP-SYB2014.pdf>.

and the benefits brought about by economic growth enjoyed by a limited few. About 772 million people still live on less than \$1.25 daily and a further 933 million more live on only \$2 daily,<sup>9</sup> suggesting many poor people continue to live in middle income countries.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, progress on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights has been mixed in Asia-Pacific.<sup>10</sup> While the region's average total fertility rate has gone down, in some countries, women have more children than they want, unmet need in contraception is still high, and women continue to carry the contraceptive burden. Most of the region's population strategies are still aimed at controlling fertility rather than having sexual and reproductive rights at its centre. The largest number of maternal deaths outside of sub-Saharan Africa is in South Asia; unsafe abortion continues to be a major factor in maternal deaths. Gender-based violence remains entrenched: intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, and sexual violence are common. Young people, in their diversity, face many challenges, lacking access to comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly services, resulting in unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, sexual violence, and exposure to harmful traditional practices like child and early marriage and female genital mutilation.

Beyond numbers, we need to look at who are the people who are being left behind and why, and how policies, programmes, and strategies must change to ensure that these reach them. Overall, women and girls from lower socio-economic status, lower or no education, or living in hard-to-reach, rural or urban poor areas have less access to sexual and reproductive health services.<sup>9</sup> People of diverse sexualities and gender identities and expressions, young people, people with disabilities, migrants, refugees, sex workers, and people living with HIV experience stigma and discrimination in accessing services. For no one to be left behind, factors and systems of marginalisation, social exclusion, and inequalities of opportunity need to be addressed, whether based on gender, age, location, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, caste, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, health status, marital status, literacy level, occupation, or citizenship status.

Exacerbating sexual and reproductive rights violations are intersections of inequality, poverty, economic and political crises, conflicts, food insecurity and malnutrition, natural and climate change-induced disasters, harmful traditional cultural practices, religious extremism, and harmful trade agreements. Migration and rapid urbanisation likewise can increase vulnerabilities.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action is to date the most comprehensive negotiated action document that considers many of these issues. At the 20-year-review process, all United Nations Member States agreed that the agenda should be continued until it is fully achieved. ICPD's full implementation is more critical than ever to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

<sup>9</sup> Sumner, Andy. 2011. Poverty in Middle Income Countries. [http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Bellagio\\_Sumner1.pdf](http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Bellagio_Sumner1.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> ARROW. Reclaiming and Redefining Right: ICPD+20: Status of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Asia Pacific. 2013. [http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ICPD-20-Asia-Pacific\\_Monitoring-Report\\_2013.pdf](http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ICPD-20-Asia-Pacific_Monitoring-Report_2013.pdf).

Ways Forward. We call on Member States, international agencies, and United Nations entities to:

Fully implement the ICPD agenda and the SRHR targets of the 2030 Agenda. There should be strong synergy between the Commission on Population and Development and the High-level political form at the global level, and with the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development at the regional level.

- Affirm that gender equality, equity, social justice, and human rights are pillars of sustainable development and basis for development planning.
- Affirm that control over bodies, sexualities, and fertility are prerequisites for women's and young people's empowerment and rights, and for enabling full participation in all domains of society — economic, social, political, and cultural.
- Recognise that people of all generations are right-holders and equally valuable members of society who can all contribute to the well-being of societies, given the right circumstances. Challenge and change negative perceptions concerning ageing and older people, as well as negative stereotypes of young people; provide equal opportunities; tailor policies and programmes to age-specific needs; and institute platforms for inter-generational dialogues.
- Guarantee the rights of women, young people, older people, migrants, and people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities and expression.
- Demonstrate greater and effective political will at all levels to facilitate the necessary changes in systems, processes, policies, and programmes.
- Put in place rights-based, gender responsive, evidence-based, and inclusive laws, policies, and programmes that proactively respond to and anticipate changing population age structures. These include:
  - o Ensuring that all people, regardless of age and any grounds for discrimination and exclusion, have universal access to education, health care, decent work, housing, food, and nutrition, amongst others, which are responsive to their different needs.
  - o Ensuring equality of women and girls, including in areas of education, employment, political participation, property ownership, and eradication of gender-based violence.
  - o Scaling up public investments — domestic resources and official development aid — to guarantee universal access to SRHR. Quality comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and information must be gender-responsive, youth-friendly, migrant-friendly, and disability-friendly, and available as far as possible in emergency settings.
  - o Providing universal, rights-based, gender-responsive, non-discriminatory, evidence-based, comprehensive sexuality education in formal and non-formal educational systems, and in out-of-school and workplace settings.

- o Addressing comprehensive needs of older people, including health and sexual and reproductive health services, social protection, and lifelong learning.
  - Repeal laws and policies that violate sexual and reproductive rights, including those related to coercive population control, erect barriers to information or services, or criminalise/marginalise specific groups based on various grounds. Adopt and implement measures to counter discriminatory practices and ensure access to justice.
  - Adopt concrete measures to mitigate the impacts of economic, food, and fuel crises, climate change, disasters, conflict, migration, religious extremism, and trade agreements to women, young people, and marginalised groups.
  - Strengthen data collection, monitoring, review and analysis on targets related to SRHR, gender equality, and health, for all age cohorts. Support qualitative research, especially those that document the lived realities of those most left behind.
  - Recognise civil society and social movements, especially those working on the rights of women, young people, and marginalised groups from the Global South, as equal partners in development at all levels, and ensure funding and an enabling environment for their work.
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