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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 International Planned Parenthood Federation, 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

International Planned Parenthood Federation

(A) About IPPF

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) welcomes the priority theme of the 50th session of the Commission on Population and Development.

As a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights and a global service provider, IPPF works through 152 Member Associations and Collaborating Partners in 172 countries to empower the most vulnerable women, men and young people to access life-saving services and programmes, and to live with dignity. We have had general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1973 ([E/2010/INF/4](#)).

(B) Changing population age structures — social and economic challenges

The social and economic challenges that population ageing is inflicting on industrialized, developed countries — including reduced labour supply and reduced productivity, consumption and savings — are widely recognized. However, population ageing in developing countries is vastly different, and is accompanied by opportunities to enhance future growth and development, as well as challenges. While the number of older people is increasing rapidly in developing countries, it is mirrored by declines in fertility. As a result, populations in these regions will in the future be dominated by working-age people. In order to realize a demographic dividend, governments in low-income countries must act quickly to increase women's economic participation and increase access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Population ageing is a natural, largely irreversible consequence of the demographic transition that all countries are going through or have completed. As fertility falls, the proportion of children in a population declines, and older, healthier adults assume an increasingly greater proportion of the population. Populations in developing countries are ageing at faster rates than populations in developed countries. By mid-century, the less developed regions as a whole will achieve an age structure similar to that of today's more developed regions. In developing countries, the proportion of children and young people (under 15 years) will decline from nearly 42 per cent in 2005 to 29 per cent in 2050. Over the same period, the proportion of children and young people in developed countries will decline by less than 2 per cent. Because of the rapid ageing process, developing countries will be "old" before they will be "rich", and before they have strong social protection systems to support a large elderly population. These countries must therefore act swiftly — typically, they have less than 50 years to capture the opportunities offered by their population age structures.

As a result of population ageing, labour-force-to-population ratios will increase in most developing countries. By 2050, working-age people will account for 65 per cent of the population, which means that population ageing will not hinder the pace of economic growth.

To promote lower dependency ratios — segments of the population that depend on working-age adults — governments must support fertility decline by making voluntary family planning universally available; by encouraging women's economic participation; and by adopting labour policies that enable women and other unemployed and under-employed individuals to combine work and family. In turn, governments and households will have more money to put into savings and be able to make more investments in human and physical capital — ideally balancing with environmental sustainability — which will all be critical when the bulk of the population is not just ageing, but elderly.

(C) Policy responses to capitalize on population ageing

To date, policies and programmes in low-income countries lag behind the realities of their population age structures. In addition to increasing access to voluntary family planning, the following are the most critical areas of policy intervention.

Women's education and economic empowerment

Gender equality is perhaps the most powerful force for improving dependency ratios and bringing about substantial growth. Girls' education and women's labour force participation are under-utilized in many contexts, and women's capabilities are often not matched by job opportunities.

Labour policies to create decent work

Large numbers of people are unemployed and under-employed due to lack of job opportunities and barriers to skilled employment. Statistical evidence from the Republic of Korea and the Philippines suggests that the ability of industries to absorb the workforce was the most critical factor for a developing country to take advantage of the demographic dividend and achieve sustainable growth. Governments in low-income countries should implement labour policies that support the private sector to create decent work for working-age people, including older people.

Strengthen family ties between daughters and parents

In parts of Asia, where population ageing will have the greatest future impact, it is traditional for women to support their husband's parents, rather than their own. As a result, many elderly people do not have strong family support. This tradition also contributes to son preference, and a lack of investment in girls and women. Governments should consider incentives to strengthen daughters' obligations to their own parents. Doing so will help share the burden of caring for the elderly across government, civil society and families, but also enhance the status of women and girls across whole societies.

Strengthen social and health care systems for older people

Governments and societies in developing countries are not well equipped currently to support and care for large numbers of older persons. Globally, 80 per cent of older persons do not have any pension coverage; policies to reduce risk factors to non-communicable diseases are inadequate; and health systems are not equipped to care for older people. Given the speed of population ageing,

governments must act quickly to strengthen social and health policies and systems to support older persons of all age groups.

(D) Changing population age structures and sustainable development

Addressing the challenges of changing population age structures and unleashing the benefits of a demographic dividend are key ingredients to ensuring sustainable development and economic growth. Over 20 years ago the ICPD Programme of Action recognized the essential interconnection between the impact of demographic pressures and sustainable development, but many countries have yet to implement robust policies and programmes that reflect and address this connection. The ICPD states that “To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, Governments should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies” (para 3.9).

This link between sexual and reproductive rights and health and sustainable development result in it being one of the priority interventions in the Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. When individuals can control their choices about sex and reproduction, and be safe and healthy in their sexual and reproductive lives, they are better able to participate in education and the labour market, to care for their families, and have more capacity to contribute to their communities and social life.

Women are more likely to be educated and meaningfully employed when they have more power over how, with whom and when they have sex, greater decision-making in relationships and control over their own reproduction. When women can realize their choices to delay, limit or space their births, they spend less time pregnant and caring for young children and can therefore spend more time in training or education. Pregnancy and complications related to childbirth remain the leading causes of mortality and disability among women of reproductive age in developing countries.

The aggregate effects of good sexual and reproductive health and rights influence the success and sustainability of social development and economic growth. Empowered citizens, population size, density and growth rates have a major impact on production, consumption, employment, income distribution, poverty, social protections and pensions, as well as environmental degradation, and realizing the demographic dividend is key strategy to realize these positive benefits.

(E) Recommendations

In order to benefit from changing population age structures and to fully realise the essential role that population plays in achieving sustainable development, the International Planned Parenthood Federation makes the following recommendations:

- Governments should put into place funded national strategies and plans to implement the 2030 Agenda targets on sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality, both to ensure that the human rights of women and girls are achieved, as well as to align to the 2030 Agenda.

- Governments should put into place policies and programmes that empower women and girls to access education and participate in the formal labour market.
 - Governments should implement labour and economic policies that create decent work and support those who are unemployed and under-employed.
 - Governments should adopt family-friendly policies that support women to be mothers and also achieve their career aspirations.
 - Government policies and funding for public health, including sexual and reproductive health, education and the labour market should be informed by long term population structures to ensure people's needs are supported through the creation of an evidence-based enabling environment.
 - Governments should undertake proactive steps to address the economic, social, cultural, political, legal and geographic barriers that limit access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially with respect to young people and marginalized communities.
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