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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's Global Network for Reproductive Rights, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

No sustainable development can be possible without sexual and reproductive health and rights

The Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights, representing over a thousand organizations and individuals worldwide working to realize the full sexual and reproductive health and rights of all people, welcomes the focus of the Commission on Population and Development on integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda.

At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, governments worldwide recognized the centrality of human rights in achieving sustainable development. And as reaffirmed at last year's forty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development, population issues are inextricably linked with sustainable development, and must be integrated into development planning and efforts. In particular, governments recognized that health is a precondition for economic and social development, as well as central to the realization of social justice. Violations of the right to health, however, particularly in terms of individuals' sexual and reproductive health and rights, continue to serve as one of the biggest impediments to social justice and sustainable development. Often stemming from narrowly conceptualized programming and planning related to population and development, issues such as unsafe abortion, stigmatizing laws that target marginalized groups, and the absence or denial of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services, continue to contribute to negative development outcomes.

Evidence from the ground cannot be refuted. In terms of unsafe abortion, human rights treaty monitoring bodies such as the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, as well as United Nations bodies such as the World Health Organization, have highlighted the clear relationship between restrictive abortion laws, unsafe abortion, and maternal morbidity and mortality. Countries with the most restrictive abortion laws experience the worst outcomes in terms of women and girls' health and their rights to life, security of person, and freedom from discrimination and cruel and inhumane treatment. Moreover, women and girls who are young, poor, unmarried, and/or in other vulnerable situations are disproportionately affected by the criminalization of abortion. They are more likely to terminate a pregnancy in higher risk situations than women who are able to access and afford private healthcare services, thereby compromising their health and often risking their lives, highlighting the impact of restrictive abortion laws in perpetuating social injustice and inequality.

Similarly, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health has noted the negative health outcomes stemming from discriminatory laws, programmes and policies that criminalize and in turn stigmatize certain groups, such as sex workers, individuals of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, and people living with HIV, among others. As noted by the Special Rapporteur in his 2010 report, "stigmatization prevents legislative and policymaking institutions from adequately addressing health-related matters in communities that are especially vulnerable to the infringement of the enjoyment of the right to health." Young

people similarly face challenges in exercising their sexual and reproductive health and rights as a result of laws imposing parental and/or marital consent limitations on the availability and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health information and services. Without being able to fully and freely exercise their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and lacking access to comprehensive, rights-based and integrated health services, such groups experience increased levels of violence, poor health outcomes, an inability to stay in school or access decent employment, and loss of employment, among other consequences (Sexual Rights Initiative 2013), rendering meaningless any efforts for inclusive, sustainable, and rights-based development.

Many of the above outcomes largely stem from a narrow approach to population and development, failing to integrate the full scope of sexual and reproductive health and rights into national laws, policies and programmes, thereby failing to universally respect, protect, and fulfil individuals' human rights. Inversely, however, evidence from countries worldwide illustrates positive outcomes from the implementation of comprehensive policies and programmes accounting for sexual and reproductive health and rights. For example, in countries where abortion is decriminalized, and safe abortion information and services as well as a range of contraceptives are widely accessible, unsafe abortion and resulting maternal mortality and morbidity are effectively eradicated. Similarly, countries worldwide have shown that in the absence of discriminatory laws, and when comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, and services are widely available, accessible, and of high-quality, contraceptive use is high, and rates of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and maternal mortality are impressively low. The provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services has also been shown to have significant ripple effects for economic and social development, such as increased school attendance among girls, reduced levels of household poverty and hunger, reduced intergenerational transfers of poverty, mitigated socioeconomic impact of HIV/AIDS, and improved environmental sustainability, among others.

It is thus clearly evident how comprehensive national policies and programming that enable the full exercise of individuals' sexual and reproductive health and rights result in positive development outcomes, demonstrating the need for a broad and intersectional approach to addressing population and development issues. We thus call upon governments to take advantage of the forty-eighth session of the Commission on Population and Development, to not only reaffirm commitments surrounding the integration of population issues into sustainable development, but also strengthen and advance them as human rights issues, particularly as they relate to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and particularly in terms of their incorporation into the post-2015 development agenda.

As noted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights enable the attainment of a whole range of other rights, and are essential in order to achieve social justice and sustainable development. It is thus high time that national laws, policies and programmes embody and reaffirm sexual and reproductive health and rights for what they are: human rights requiring respect, protection, and fulfilment, in order to attain holistic wellbeing.

Key recommendations for the conclusions of the forty-eighth session of the Commission on Population and Development:

(a) Reaffirm sexual and reproductive health and rights as human rights, integral to addressing population issues and achieving a universally relevant and transformative sustainable development agenda across its social, economic, and environmental dimensions;

(b) Recognize the need for comprehensive, intersectional policies and programmes related to population and development, which account for sexual and reproductive health and rights as central to the achievement of social justice;

(c) Incorporate the Programme of Action from the International Conference on Population and Development, as well as the outcome documents of its 20 year regional review conferences into the post-2015 development agenda;

(d) Thoroughly integrate human rights into the post-2015 development agenda, with the understanding that any meaningful efforts towards sustainable development must posit people as the drivers of development rather than passive receivers of aid priorities and programming;

(e) Ensure that the post-2015 development goals include targets and indicators on: the universal provision of and access to a full range of high-quality, voluntary, and user-friendly contraceptive methods, including emergency contraception; young people's access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education and services; the right to access safe abortion services, recommending that governments review and repeal laws that criminalize voluntary abortion, and remove all legal and implementation barriers to ensuring access to safe, comprehensive, and high-quality procedures for pregnancy termination; the eradication of all forms of violence and discrimination, including institutional violence, based on age, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, class, ethnicity, religion, disability, migrant or HIV status, among other grounds;

(f) Include throughout the post-2015 development goals specific indicators focused on women and young people, so as to ensure that the human rights and empowerment of women, girls and young people are incorporated as a cross-cutting priority of the post-2015 development framework and its monitoring;

(g) In the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, prioritize the systematic and coordinated collection, analysis, and use of data disaggregated by sex, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, location, income and other variables, to effectively monitor progress and ensure accountability.