

Statement by Ambassador Martin Shearman of the UK Mission at the Commission on Population and Development 48th Session

Thank you very much Madam Chair.

Over twenty years ago at the International Conference on Population and Development, the international community affirmed that population and sustainable development are about people, not numbers. Together we recognised that the only way to achieve sustainable development is through upholding, and respecting, the human rights of individuals.

Now, as we enter the third decade of implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, progress is evident: fewer women die giving birth; gender parity in primary education has improved; and extreme poverty has decreased.

In committing to put people first, the ICPD was ahead of its time. But for too many the promises made in Cairo have not been fulfilled. We owe it to the poorest, the most vulnerable, the most marginalised, those left furthest behind, to keep our focus on upholding the universal values at the core of the ICPD agenda, and on making discrimination and inequality a thing of the past.

Madam Chair,

The UK's vision is a world where girls and women participate actively in their societies and economies. We have therefore put girls and women at the heart of our international development efforts, empowering them to have voice, choice and control over their lives. Despite some progress, there is still too much stubborn resistance to the simple notion that women and girls have the right to decide what happens to their own bodies. Promoting, investing in, and protecting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and women is fundamental to their empowerment.

We know that universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights helps achieve significant development and economic benefits. Fewer and healthier pregnancies can lead to healthier outcomes for women and children. Falling birth rates can generate a 'demographic dividend', increasing the ratio of working adults to dependents, creating economic growth, and improving the health, education and welfare of citizens and their children.

We also know that the right to decide freely and responsibly on matters related to sexuality, free from coercion, discrimination and violence is essential for individuals, for their families in the various and diverse forms they take, and to our societies more broadly. We need to use all the evidence available to stop girls dropping out of school; to prevent their death or illness from too-early pregnancies; to reduce deaths from unsafe abortion; and to prevent adolescents from risking their health and exposing themselves to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education must be available and accessible to all.

Madam Chair,

2015 will see the adoption of a new international development agenda. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls must be front and centre. We need a dedicated gender goal, clear gender-related targets, including under a health goal, and disaggregation of data by sex and age throughout the framework.

In doing this we must remember that we already have a powerful and relevant development agenda: the ICPD Programme of Action, which remains woefully underfunded and inadequately implemented. We must take its lessons into the post-2015 development agenda.

The United Kingdom urges Member States here at the Commission on Population and Development to not just reiterate, reaffirm and recall the important goals and targets from Cairo, but to take this opportunity to strengthen our collective commitment to real and lasting implementation. To recognize the links between human rights, population dynamics and sustainable development. And to keep people at the centre of our population policies.

Thank you very much.