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Population Dynamics in the 21st Century –
Transforming Challenges into Opportunities
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Keynote speech:

**“Working towards the future we want for all:
UN processes and UNFPA Priorities”**

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First, let me thank you for your kind invitation and say how much we at UNFPA appreciate your initiative. The interaction among population dynamics and other aspects of development is vitally important for roadmapping the future. This applies of course to government and private sector planning; but it also contributes to the decisions of individuals and families. When a farmer's family decides to move to the city, they go in search of a better life. The farm can't feed them all, clinics and schools are miles away, and their taxes only go up. They don't think, "Ah, that's population dynamics interacting with food security, health and governance." But that's what is happening. Your discussions in the next two days will largely concern development policy and planning; but they will have a direct bearing on the lives and health of millions of people in the poorest countries.

It is right that our discussion should be focused on the poorest countries and people. When the world adopted the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, the aim was to halve extreme poverty by 2015. While many countries, and the developing world as a whole, are on track, the least-developed countries lag far behind. Progress is weak in a number of areas of primary concern to a people-focused development agenda, notably sexual and reproductive health.

The global financial and economic crisis has drawn attention yet again to the vulnerability of the poor, the importance of drawing in sustainable and productive investment, and the need for decent work. Population growth and climate change make it even more urgent to find the means of sustainable production and consumption, and underline the imperative of international co-operation. Those who benefit most from the global economic system have a duty towards the less fortunate: they also have to understand that the global economy cannot be separated from global social and environmental responsibility. We will survive as one world, or not at all.

The Secretary-General has clearly expressed,¹ his desire to integrate the fight against poverty with sustainable development. It is also reflected by two important reports on these issues, the outcome document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development and the report of the UN Task Team on the post-2015 development agenda. Their focus is not so much on outlining the future we want, but finding ways to realize it, for everyone.

Against this background, let me say a few words on

1. How the UN agencies are currently supporting the development of the post-2015 agenda.
2. How UNFPA's concerns are linked to the discussions on the post-2015 agenda, and
3. Priorities for the post-2015 agenda.

1. How do the UN agencies support the development of the post-2015 agenda?

The inter-agency UN Task Team on the post-2015 agenda has established three working groups: The first, on monitoring and indicators, will provide suggestions on how to measure progress towards the future we want; the second, on global partnerships, will provide suggestions on how we can strengthen international collaborations; complement North-South partnerships with South-South and triangular partnerships, and combine official development assistance with private support. Finally, a working group on sustainable development goals will provide advice on social, economic and environmental challenges and objectives.

The first and second working groups will inform the Secretary-General's High-level Panel of eminent persons on the post-2015 agenda; and the third will advise the Open-ended Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, which was mandated by the Rio+20 conference. UNFPA is represented in all three working groups.

¹ In a Press Release of 31 July 2012, the Secretary-General says "I have asked my High-level Panel to prepare a bold yet practical development vision to present to Member States next year [...]. I look forward to the Panel's recommendations on a global post-2015 agenda with shared responsibilities for all countries and with the fight against poverty and sustainable development at its core".

Complementary to the efforts of the UN Task Team, the UN Development Group, comprising over 30 agencies, is undertaking about 100 national consultations and 11 global thematic consultations on the post-2015 development agenda. UNFPA is supporting national consultations through its regional and country offices, and is involved in the global thematic consultations at headquarters level. In collaboration with the UN's Population Division, UN Habitat and IOM, and in close consultation with ILO, FAO, WFP, UN Women and OHCHR, UNFPA is leading the global thematic consultation on population dynamics, and is actively involved in the global consultations on health; education; inequalities; governance, and conflict and fragility. UNFPA will inform the global consultations on environmental sustainability; food; water; energy, and employment and economic growth.

UNFPA contributions to the UN Task Team and the UNDG consultations are informed by the ICPD Programme of Action, which represents the international consensus on how sustainable development is influenced by population dynamics, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality and the empowerment of young people

2. How are UNFPA's concerns linked to the discussion on the post-2015 agenda?

Population dynamics – growth, aging, urbanization and migration – have serious implications for economic and social development. They have a direct impact on water, food and energy security; environmental sustainability and climate change; our ambition to ensure universal access to health, education and other essential services; and sustainable urbanization and rural development

A growing world population living at a higher standard will increase pressures on all natural resources. Feeding 8 billion people in 2030, will require an increase in food production of about 50 per cent, according to the High-level Panel.² At the same time, we will need 45 per cent more

² <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/01/30/us-un-development-idUSTRE80T10520120130>

energy and 30 per cent more fresh water. The UK government's chief scientific adviser has described it as a "perfect storm" of linked crises.³

By 2030, we cannot bend the population curve very far: the parents of the next generation are already born. Seeking shelter from the storm, and trying to avoid plunging three billion people into poverty, countries and the international community must concentrate urgently on meeting needs for food, energy and water.

But that doesn't mean we should not act on population. Demography isn't destiny, and long-term demographic trends depend on the policies we adopt today. Small differences in fertility and family size have vast effects over time, as the UN population projections show. The difference between the medium and low variant projections for the least-developed countries is 66 million in 2030, but grows to 200 million by 2050. These are projections, not predictions, but they show what can happen.

We can address population dynamics by promoting human rights and expanding individual freedom and opportunities. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health care, including voluntary family planning; investing in the education of youth with a particular focus on girls; and the empowerment of women can make a big difference. These measures will help improve people's wellbeing, reduce child and maternal mortality, halt the spread of communicable diseases, reduce unintended pregnancies, influence the trend towards gender equality and contribute to lower fertility and slower population growth. As women can space and choose the number of children they have, families can invest more in each child – resulting in children with better health and education. As the perceived value of girl children grows, families will invest more in them. This trend has multiplying effects across families, communities and nations, helping to promote economic development and combat poverty on a large scale.

Population structures and dynamics vary of course from country to country. The least-developed countries continue to see a rapid increase in their youth populations, while post-industrial countries' populations are aging fast. Urbanization is the dominant feature in the developing world – in fact global population growth is now entirely urban growth in developing countries. By anticipating and planning for these changes in population

³ <http://www.govnet.co.uk/news/govnet/professor-sir-john-beddingtons-speech-at-sduk-09>

size, location and age structure, countries can address many associated challenges and seize opportunities.

Experience with the MDGs has taught policymakers the importance of population dynamics. For example, while many countries lowered the share of their populations living in extreme poverty, in some countries the numbers of the poor actually increased because of population growth.

The post-2015 agenda must concern itself with population dynamics over the next 20-30 years. It is not enough for example to plan for the needs of the 222 million women who cannot access family planning today; policymakers must look ahead, to the needs of the millions of young women who will enter reproductive age in the coming decades. We estimate that demand for family planning alone will increase by 40 per cent by 2030. One of the most important policy tools will be disaggregated population data, to show more clearly where the needs are, and on what scale. What is the likely need for new schools in rural areas, for example, if fertility is falling and cities are growing? Should policymakers concentrate instead on improving conditions for girls in school, as families invest more in girls' education?

Against this background,

3. What are UNFPA's priorities with respect to the post-2015 agenda?

Let me highlight seven broad priorities.

- 1. We need a forward-looking development agenda that takes account of projected population dynamics.** The post-2015 development agenda must address the needs of coming as well as present generations. Today's "youthquake" will turn into the biggest workforce the world has ever seen, and in time become the largest-ever generation of older people. The question is not *whether* countries will plan for their changing needs, but *how*, and with what resources. This may sound obvious, but governments and businesses have often been caught off-guard by demographic changes they simply failed to foresee and plan for. It is always easier to meet current needs than invest in the future – and in developing countries, there are many urgent priorities pressing for immediate attention. But even the most hard-pressed development budget looks to the future and invests in

projects that take years to bear fruit. Wise choices depend on good data, and a keen appreciation of population dynamics.

- 2. We need a development agenda that looks beyond averages and addresses variations among groups and regions.** Planners and policymakers need to know where people are, who they are and how their needs vary from place to place and over time. There are wide disparities between rich and poor, wide variations among ethnic groups, many differences in population structure – more older people here, more younger people there, higher literacy in one place, better health outcomes in another. There are specially vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, poor rural women and adolescents, and people affected by emergencies. All have special needs.

One example of disparity is gender inequality, which is apparent in almost all aspects of life, including access to education, participation in economic activities, and representation in political office. Eliminating it requires a comprehensive approach, to remove gender-related discrimination and stigma, promote the human rights of women and girls, and engage men and boys in transforming gender norms, values, roles and stereotypes. But it also calls for more nuanced approaches: Gender disparities vary among different cultures within a country. They are affected by urban or rural residence, family income, education level and a variety of other measures. Attention to population dynamics will reveal these variations and permit targeted approaches to gender equality.

- 3. We need a development agenda grounded in human rights.** While it is critical that the new development agenda takes account of population dynamics, it must also emphasize a human-rights-based approach to population issues, as outlined in the ICPD Programme of Action. Let me be very clear, the need to anticipate and address population dynamics is not to be construed as an endorsement of coercion or over-persuasion, in whatever form. Let me point out here that family planning programmes are far more likely to be effective when they guarantee respectful treatment, privacy and confidentiality; when they offer accurate and complete information and a choice of appropriate contraceptive methods, and when they are offered together with other SRH services.

The empowerment of women and girls, men and boys is the best way to promote a promising and sustainable future. The only meaningful way to address population dynamics is by enlarging, not restricting, individual choices and opportunities.

- 4. We need a development agenda that ensures universal access to comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health services and reproductive rights.** Ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights is a core human rights obligation. It lies at the heart of inclusive social development. There is a fundamental link between sexual and reproductive health and rights and the ability of individuals to participate fully and meaningfully in their respective communities, especially those who are socially or economically at a disadvantage.

Integrated SRHR encompasses (i) voluntary and high-quality family planning, (ii) maternal and new-born healthcare; (iii) prevention, diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; (iv) reproductive cancers screening; and (v) infertility counselling. SRHR prevents unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and includes access to post-abortion care and safe abortion when it is not against the law. Services should be provided free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

Integrated SRH services and attention to quality of care both improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes, and avoid costs and burdens across the whole health care system.

Programmes should aim for universal coverage, and eliminate barriers to access and use of services, including among the most difficult to reach and most vulnerable groups. These policies should go hand in hand with programmes to mitigate inequalities of access among different groups.

- 5. We need a development agenda that empowers young people.** Young people aged 10 to 24 represent 25 per cent of today's world population. In a quite literal sense, they hold the world's future in their hands – and in their heads. Much is expected of them – but we must match our

expectations with our investment in their capabilities. This applies especially to girls and young women, who have a lot of catching up to do.

All countries must take action to protect young people's human rights; guarantee health care and education at least to secondary level; help them learn livelihood skills, live healthy lives, and find decent work. Their education should include comprehensive sexuality education, both in and out of school, to help them become fully mature and responsible adults.

Today's high-fertility countries can see a historic window of opportunity opening as the "youthquake generation" enters the workforce. They will have fewer children than their parents did, easing their countries' dependency burden. As they age and become dependents in their turn, the window will close again. Countries who have invested in their young people will reap the benefits of smaller, healthier families, higher productivity and faster economic growth.

6. We need a development agenda that supports intergenerational solidarity, social protection, pensions and health care systems. While working adults share the responsibility to invest in the young and help them find decent work, younger people are expected in their turn to support their elders. In a rapidly-aging population the aim should be to minimize poverty among older people, encourage their independence and avoid imposing an unfair burden of care on working families. The new development agenda should shift the burden from individual families to the whole community, by encouraging investment in social security, pension and elder care.

7. We need a development agenda that emphasizes governance and the rule of law. All these proposals call for institutions and administrations that are able to manage increasingly complex economies and social structures in a period of rapid change; can identify and address both challenges and opportunities, and do all this while ensuring the rule of law and respect of human rights. It takes time to build and maintain reliable legislative and judicial institutions, with the necessary mechanisms to support them – but it is the only sustainable path, and the international community must be ready to support it, over the long term.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Countries' experience, and their repeated endorsement of the ICPD Programme of Action, shows that the long-term goals agreed in 1994 are still valid today. Based on this experience, with the inputs not only of governments but of civil society and the private sector, and our daily involvement in population and development programmes, we at UNFPA believe that a successful post-2015 development agenda will follow the same broad path. We believe that all partners can jointly develop a shared vision of the future we all want, and that the post-2015 development agenda will help us to achieve it.

Thank you.