

Opening Statement
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Latin America Sub regional Meeting to Assess the Implementation of the
Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and
Development
Fifteen Years after its Adoption
Santiago, Chile, 7-8 October, 2009

Excellencies and Distinguished representatives of the Government of Chile
Ms. Alicia Bárcena, Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ECLAC,
Excellencies,
Honorable Ministers,
Distinguished participants
Colleagues and friends,

“Es para mí un gran honor estar inaugurando este encuentro organizado por la CEPAL en coordinación con el UNFPA para la evaluación de la implementación del Programa de Acción de la Conferencia Internacional sobre Población y Desarrollo en los últimos quince años”.

And now to English. I would like to thank you Alicia for your kind words. We also value very much the collaboration with ECLAC. As we commemorate the fifteen years of the commitment undertaken in Cairo, meetings as this one are taking place worldwide. These spaces which gather Governments, Civil Society Organizations and experts alike represent a unique opportunity to reflect together on the progress made, identify lessons learned and reenergize for the road that we still have to go.

This meeting in Santiago represents the culmination of a very important regional process which included, apart from an important meeting with NGOs to align their work with the ICPD Plan of

Action, a Caribbean Sub Regional Meeting, which took place in Antigua and Barbuda with the participation of over 15 countries of the sub region. The results, priorities and recommendations from that meeting will be shared as a contribution to the debate today and hopefully to the results of our meeting. We will also build on the Declaration of Panama, a statement emanated by a women's meeting representing regional networks from Latin America and the Caribbean which was held recently in Panama City.

Earlier in September, an ICPD at 15 NGO Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development was also held in Berlin. In that meeting, strategic options for NGOs were agreed upon as a road map for enhanced efforts towards the achievement of the Programme of Action in synergy with the MDGs to be achieved by 2015 and continuing beyond. Next week, on Monday, October 12, the UN General Assembly (GA) in New York will commemorate the 15th anniversary of ICPD. Your deliberations hopefully will be carried to the GA.

Distinguished participants,

The worldwide consensus achieved at the International Conference on Population and Development was indeed unprecedented: 179 nations endorsed the Programme of Action as a roadmap on population and development issues over the next 20 years.

The Programme of Action represented a paradigm shift in the field of population and development. On the one hand, it addressed the complex interactions between environmental and socio economic matters with population issues, and on the other, it centered its attention on the fulfillment of the needs of individuals and the respect of their human rights. At the core of the ICPD lies a singular objective: to put our world into a greater balance and improve the lives of current and future generations.

The ICPD provided much of the groundwork for the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals. It is now internationally recognized that integrating population analysis into development plans, promoting the right to sexual and reproductive health and advancing women's empowerment and gender equality are indeed essential for the achievement of the

MDGs. The MDGs will not be achieved unless progress is also made to guarantee universal access to Reproductive Health by 2015.

Together, we have made much progress in the past 15 years.

Today, more women and couples are choosing to plan their families. Spacing births and preventing unintended pregnancies saves lives, and improves the health and well-being of women, families and nations. Planning the family allows more opportunities for women to engage in productive activities and become more empowered, two variables that are actually critical for social justice and economic development.

Today, as we commemorate the 15th anniversary of ICPD, we celebrate achievements and identify constraints and lessons learned. We must use this opportunity to challenge ourselves on how to further accelerate implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and to take full advantage of all the extraordinary knowledge and experience accumulated in this region. We have only five years remaining to make the commitment of Cairo a reality for all, and many people are counting on us, especially those who are most excluded.

Latin America has much to celebrate, and I want to pay tribute to the governments, parliamentarians, the women's movement, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, as well as to the peoples of this region, including the young, indigenous women and the elderly, for all the progress made in the last 15 years.

Much has been done to create an environment conducive to achieving ICPD goals. I would like to mention, in particular, the implementation of a rights-based approach, the reduction of poverty, the adoption of laws and policies in support of ICPD goals, be it for reproductive health, for gender equality, or for harmonious population dynamics, as well as the success in this region in building strong and sustainable partnerships. This region has much positive experience to share with the rest of the world.

It is most encouraging to see that the region has been successful, for example, in reducing unmet need for family planning and has been able to start reducing the spread of HIV transmission.

These achievements are not yet universal, and one important challenge in this region is to reduce disparities, whether these are geographical and/or social, to reach the most hard to reach, the most vulnerable.

As you know, a persistent manifestation of inequity in the world is maternal health. If maternal mortality has declined in some countries of the region, it still remains at unacceptable levels in others, and even in those where it declined, stark disparities still remain among different population groups and geographical regions. Other important challenges include in particular addressing adolescent pregnancies and gender-based violence.

Another issue of increasing concern today is of course climate change, which will have the biggest impact on the poor and especially on women. Together we must find ways to ensure that those who bear the brunt of climate change can weather the storm and improve their living standards. In other words, we must address the human dimension of climate change.

I look forward to our discussions today and tomorrow. I am confident that you will reaffirm your commitment to the ICPD principles and goals, that you will identify concretely how this region can accelerate the pace of progress in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action in the next five years. You will discuss the need to redouble efforts in making ICPD a reality on the ground, in a sustainable manner. You will reflect on the need to further develop national and regional capacities. You will also discuss how to increase resources for ICPD, but more importantly how to use them more effectively – be they knowledge, partners, as well as human and financial resources. This is especially important today as the current economic and financial crisis is threatening to wipe out hard-won gains in poverty reduction, health, and education. It is therefore essential that we continue together to devise the way forward with a focus always on human rights and equity.

Distinguished participants,

2009 also marks the 40th anniversary of UNFPA. From a small fund established in 1969, UNFPA has become a leader internationally in matters of population and development, and a trustworthy partner at country level. We have recently strengthened our presence at the regional level to be closer to the people we serve. And we continue to believe very strongly and closely work with partners, including sister organizations in the United Nations family (collaboration with ECLAC is a very good example of this), civil society, private sector and all partners, most of all our national counterparts.

The Cairo Consensus has anchored population at the center of the development agenda and placed human beings at the very heart of the development process, making it clear that population is not about numbers, but about people.

We look forward to your deliberations and to working together in implementing your recommendations. It is our hope that in the next five years, we will be working collaboratively to accomplish even more than what we did in the past 15 years. We owe it to the people in the Latin America and Caribbean region who count on us.

I would like to conclude by thanking most sincerely Ms. Alicia Bárcena and all colleagues in ECLAC for co-hosting this important meeting. I thank all those who have been involved in the preparatory work - much work has gone into the preparation- including through events leading up to today. Last but not least, I would like to express the gratitude of UNFPA to the Government of Chile for their warm hospitality. It is wonderful to be in this beautiful city of Santiago.

I look forward to our discussions.

Thank you.