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Official Records

President: Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Plane crash in Haiti

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Before proceeding to consider the item on the agenda for this morning, I wish to convey, on behalf of the General Assembly, our deepest sympathy and condolences to the Governments of Uruguay and Jordan and to the families of the 11 United Nations staff members who were killed in Haiti in a plane crash on Friday, 9 October 2009.

Agenda item 48

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with resolution 63/9, of 3 November 2008, the General Assembly will now devote one day of plenary meetings to the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development.

Before we proceed, I should like to remind members that, in a letter dated 6 October 2009 addressed to all Permanent Representatives and Observers, I indicated my intention to invite

Ms. Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, to make a statement this morning following the intervention by the Secretary-General. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to invite Ms. Obaid to make such a statement?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development is an important opportunity to mark the progress that has been made over the years and to take note of the challenges that remain in meeting the objectives set out in Cairo.

The Cairo Conference was part of a series of development conferences held by the United Nations in the 1990s. As the Assembly may recall, those conferences covered a wide range of themes — from protecting the environment to promoting human rights and from social development to human settlements and advancing the status of women. All of those conferences contributed to the Millennium Summit and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which provide a unifying framework for international development. They are inscribed on an international agenda that is based on common goals that continue to guide our efforts today.

In fact, we are talking about a process that goes back at least 40 years, when the United Nations Population Fund was established. During the past four decades, we have learned that every society's hopes

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and prospects for peace, prosperity and social and economic development are closely tied to its demography. It is evident that if States are to provide adequately for their citizens, they need to incorporate population analysis and policies into their development strategies.

We also understand better that there is a limit to the pressures that our global environment can withstand. It is clear from the climate change crisis that we must tackle unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. Rising carbon emissions, deforestation and water shortages point to the need to bring people and the environment into greater balance and harmony. Urgent and collective action is required to protect the natural resources on which all life depends. We also need to ensure that the benefits of globalization are equally shared by all. And we have to urgently cope with the wide-ranging consequences of the world financial and economic crisis, especially its impact on global poverty, which is on the rise, and development objectives, which have been set back.

The consensus reached in Cairo 15 years ago continues to guide us on the way ahead with regard to the interlinked issues of population, economic growth and sustainable development. It includes recommendations related to child survival, women's health and safe motherhood. It makes a strong case for reproductive health and rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Better understanding of those issues has brought about real change in the daily lives of millions of women, men and young people. They now have greater choices and can make informed decisions on fundamental aspects of their lives. Today, more girls are going to school. More infants are surviving. More people are living free of HIV and AIDS. All that is good news for which every nation in the world can be proud of and can take some credit. That progress has been achieved by enhancing knowledge and individual opportunity and by broadening choices. We should maintain that spirit of international consensus and cooperation.

I would like to pay tribute to the United Nations Population Fund, which has supported countries in carrying the Cairo agreement forward. I would also like to pay tribute to civil society for its contribution to this collective effort.

As we look ahead, we must ensure that the vision and goals of Cairo are an integral part of the 15-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 10-year review of the MDGs to be carried out by the General Assembly next year.

In the end, the overarching goal is to create greater balance between population and development and to improve the lives of current and future generations. Let us today renew and strengthen our commitment to the vision and holistic nature of the Cairo agreement. Let us also commit ourselves to stronger action to implement in full the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: We are here today to commemorate a watershed event. The 1994 Cairo Conference marked a major shift in the international mindset on population issues. Countries from around the world affirmed that population, far from being about numbers, is about people, and that women's health, education, employment and empowerment were the keys to a sustainable future.

The Cairo Conference grappled with some of the most sensitive issues of our day and achieved a consensus. Nearly 180 Governments agreed to put gender equality, reproductive health and reproductive rights at the centre of development. They acknowledged the importance of universal education, especially for girls. They recognized the need to prevent the unnecessary deaths of infants, children and mothers, and they stressed the need to make sure that all people who want reproductive health care can get it. Participants also agreed that women and girls will never be empowered unless we eliminate violence against them and ensure that they can control their own fertility.

The Conference was a shining example of what the United Nations does like no other organization in the world — act as a pioneer in addressing global challenges and bring Governments together to set international goals that go further than many countries would on their own.

Fifteen years ago in Cairo, for the first time, Governments acknowledged that every person has the right to sexual and reproductive health. Today, we meet to hail the progress that has been achieved, to

acknowledge the many problems that remain, and to strengthen our resolve to overcome them.

Fifteen years ago, fewer than half of all women used modern contraception. Today, more women and couples — 56 per cent, up from 47 per cent — can choose if or when they want to have children, and how many. Fifteen years ago, 71 out of every 1,000 babies died during their first year of life. Today, that number has been cut to 51 per 1,000. Fifteen years ago, fewer than half of all women giving birth in developing countries had skilled health personnel to help them. Now, more than 60 per cent receive this lifesaving assistance.

The international community has worked hard for this progress. I especially wish to pay tribute to the United Nations Population Fund for its tireless advocacy and invaluable activities.

But as we all know, despite these efforts, the Cairo consensus remains more a goal than a reality for far too many people. Some 200 million women still do not have access to safe and effective contraception. Too many women resort to abortions that are not safe because they lack access to family planning. In too many countries, girls are still married off as child brides. The dangerous practice of genital mutilation and other harmful traditions continue to have a terrible impact. Sexual violence, especially during conflict, continues to victimize women on a mass scale. And the number of deaths from childbirth — a staggering toll of more than half a million women each year — has not changed since the Cairo Conference.

We have a clear plan to address these problems: the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The Programme is critical to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It is especially important for Goal 5, which is to cut maternal mortality and achieve universal access to reproductive health care. Progress on reaching that target has been slower than on any other. Maternal health is linked directly to a country's health system. When we improve maternal health, all people will benefit.

To fully carry out the Cairo Programme of Action means providing women with reproductive health services, including family planning. It means backing poverty-eradication initiatives, and it means preventing rape during wartime and ending the culture of impunity. All of these actions require funding.

This may be a time of global financial turmoil and economic downturn, but it is not a time to renege on our promises to protect and invest in women — for their sake and for the sake of our collective future. I am personally committed to doing everything possible to empower women here at the United Nations and around the world. I call on all development partners to join me in recommitting to the Cairo Programme of Action until all of its promises are fulfilled.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

May I take it that the General Assembly wishes to close the list of speakers on this item now?

It was so decided.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the decision made earlier and without setting a precedent, I now give the floor to the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund.

Ms. Obaid (United Nations Population Fund): I would like to thank you, Sir, for your opening remarks and for giving me the opportunity to address the Assembly at this special commemoration. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his unwavering support for the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

Fifteen years ago, at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, 179 Governments ignited a spark of change that continues to improve the lives of people. The Programme of Action puts people at the centre of development. It calls for the collection and analysis of population data to guide equitable policy decisions. It positions reproductive health, including family planning, healthy relationships and the well-being of individuals, as a right. It makes it clear that when women are empowered and supported in determining the number and spacing of their children — a decision that is seemingly simple yet so complex — they improve their own lives and the well-being of their families, communities and countries.

The right to sexual and reproductive health and women's empowerment are core to the linkages between population and development. Reproductive choices are central to gender equality and can influence population dynamics. The Cairo agenda addresses the needs and rights of all people, irrespective of their

situations, including migrants, refugees and displaced persons, and it makes a connection between population, the environment and peace, security and development.

The holistic Cairo consensus remains practical and pertinent as we confront today's daunting challenges. Today, I pay tribute to Governments and civil society for their accomplishments since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, and I call on the private sector to be more responsive.

I pay tribute to Ms. Nafis Sadik, former Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), who was the Secretary-General of the Cairo Conference. She has devoted her professional life to promoting the right of women to make decisions about their own lives. And I salute the dedicated staff of UNFPA for their commitment to working with Governments, civil society and communities in order to implement the Programme of Action, often under challenging circumstances.

During the past 15 years, we have learned a great deal in carrying the Cairo consensus forward, and I would like to share with the Assembly five lessons learned that point the way forward.

First, we know that the aspirations expressed in the Cairo consensus are taking root at the local level. Although the debate on sexual and reproductive health is not always easy, dialogue is expanding and concrete progress is being made. Today, there is growing recognition that cultural values and interpretations of sacred texts can either punish and harm women or liberate and support them. Countries and communities are engaged in conversations and programmes that address culturally loaded issues such as child marriage, girls' education, HIV prevention, female genital mutilation/cutting and violence against women.

All over the world, communities are progressively invoking values and beliefs that protect the rights of women and young people, and bringing about change from within. We are witnessing a growing number of men of all walks of life standing side by side with women to end traditional practices that harm women, as well as to end violence against women. Here, I would like, on behalf of UNFPA, to express appreciation for the leadership shown by the Secretary-General in his campaign *Unite to End Violence against Women*.

Secondly, we know that investment is critical. While we keep repeating that no woman should die giving life, women continue to die needlessly from preventable causes during pregnancy and childbirth — one woman during every minute of my statement. The good news is that momentum for maternal health is building and there is growing commitment at the highest levels. Now we need to match that commitment with increased funding for a comprehensive package of maternal and reproductive health services to achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 5.

In war or peace, in natural or man-made disasters, in a prosperous economy or during a financial crisis, women continue to get pregnant. What happens after that depends on whether they are rich or poor. They can give birth, or they sometimes seek abortion, safely and legally or unsafely, outside national laws; they sometimes miscarry; and too often, they die from preventable causes while giving birth. We cannot change or postpone those facts of life until the war ends, until communities have recovered from the disaster or until the economy is strong again.

During this decade, funding for population and reproductive health has remained at the same level, while funding for other areas of health has increased substantially. Today, I call on all Governments to make the health and reproductive rights of women a financial priority. By ensuring universal access to reproductive health — including family planning — to all, rich or poor, women can manage the number and spacing of their pregnancies. That will accelerate progress towards achieving all the Millennium Development Goals, particularly MDG 1: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

Thirdly, we know that today's demographic challenges are unprecedented and that they demand coherent policy responses. Population data, if properly analysed and utilized, provide a solid foundation for developing responsive policies and programmes and for monitoring and ensuring accountability. The 2010 round of censuses provides much-needed data, and surveys and rapid assessments lead us to target responses to the most vulnerable.

While we welcome the largest population of young people in the world's history, we are, at the same time, seeing an increase in the number of older persons worldwide. Governments are responsible for providing support to old and young simultaneously in a

challenging development context. I call upon the Assembly to take this opportunity to foster intergenerational solidarity.

While we are witnessing rapid population growth in the world's poorest nations, some of the world's richest countries face population declines. In order to address both scenarios, women and couples need expanded choices when it comes to childbearing and child-rearing.

In the poorest countries with high fertility and mortality rates, intensified efforts are needed to provide reproductive health services — including family planning — to meet the unmet need of the 200 million women who want to plan their families but do not have the means to do so. In countries with low fertility, specific policies and programmes are needed to ensure that women and couples can balance work and family life and that there is social protection for the ageing. In several Nordic countries, there is preliminary evidence that, after a certain point of development — especially development that benefits women and supports them with family-friendly policies and services — fertility rises again. This shows once again the direct link between economic and social development, poverty reduction, women's empowerment, gender equality and population dynamics.

Fourthly, we know that working in silos does not produce maximum benefits, because people's lives, needs and rights are intertwined. In order to generate greater progress, development partners are increasingly working together across sectors to build national capacity, engage communities and strengthen national systems. The United Nations is harmonizing its support for countries aimed at increasing national ownership and scaling up national programmes. United Nations reform for development effectiveness is critical if we are to achieve better results on the ground.

My fifth and last point is that, knowing that hard-won development gains can be easily reversed and very difficult to regain, we must take urgent and concerted action to protect the most vulnerable. Today, women and children constitute almost 80 per cent of the world's poor. As world leaders take decisions concerning the financial, energy, food and climate change crises, they must focus on the impact of those crises on the poor, especially women and children. Otherwise, women and children will bear the brunt of

those multiple crises and society as a whole will be diminished. That is an important message to carry forward to the climate change conference in Copenhagen.

Our challenge is to summon the courage and wisdom to respond to those crises and to foster development that is both socially equitable and environmentally sound. To that end, the ICPD Programme of Action remains a valid blueprint. As we look forward to 2015, we need to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, and as we commemorate its fifteenth anniversary and look forward to the next five years, development partners at the global, regional and country levels are reaffirming their commitments.

In September, almost 400 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) — a third of them young people — came from 130 countries to the NGO Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development. In the Berlin Call to Action, they called on Governments to accelerate the implementation of the promises made in Cairo, including the provision of youth-friendly services and comprehensive sexuality and life-skills education. That would allow young people to make informed decisions and take responsible action, because ignorance is death. They urged Governments to strengthen their commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. As NGOs, they pledged to work in partnership with Governments, United Nations agencies and other development partners to ensure the full and timely implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

This month, we are looking forward to many events, including an NGO conference in Beijing on sexual and reproductive health for Asia and the Pacific, a meeting of the Partners in Population and Development, and a ministerial meeting on maternal health and an international parliamentary conference, both to be held in Addis Ababa, to galvanize greater commitment and action.

As we move forward, my colleagues and I at UNFPA will continue to listen to the members of the Assembly. We will continue to work with their national institutions and with civil society, and we will continue to support them in implementing their national programmes as envisioned in the ICPD Programme of Action. In this, we are guided by passion for the agenda, compassion for the people we serve and

commitment to national ownership by Governments and communities.

I thank the Assembly for putting people first.

Ms. Kurbanova (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): It is my honour to extend the greetings of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan to the members of the Assembly at this meeting devoted to commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development.

Upon achieving independence, Tajikistan chose the model of a social State, as enshrined in its Constitution. This has determined State policy priorities in the areas of social security and social development. State support for families and children is recognized by the Government of Tajikistan as its highest priority. This is reflected in the generally recognized status of our social institutions as well as in the urgent problems facing our society at the current stage of its development. The newly adopted Constitution of the Republic reinforces and guarantees universally recognized values to protect the equal rights of men and women in our society. The Republic of Tajikistan has ratified virtually all international instruments on the equality of the rights of men and women and on combating all forms of violence against women and children.

A review of the basic indicators for the development of Tajikistan's population over the past 15 years since the Cairo Conference in 1994 shows that the Republic of Tajikistan survived a period of political instability and has undertaken the process of developing market relations. My country's economy is now moving towards a qualitatively new stage of management and administration.

However, there are still quite a few unresolved problems, the principal one being the matter of overcoming poverty. According to the 1999 World Bank Living Standards Survey for the country, the percentage of the population living below the poverty line was 82 in 2003, 64 in 2005, and 53.5 in 2007. According to the World Bank data, the factors responsible for that reduction in poverty were, first and foremost, peace, macroeconomic stability and migration of the population.

Since the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan recognizes poverty as one of its most

important problems, it has devoted significant efforts to implementing a poverty reduction policy. To promote speedy and socially just economic growth, increase real incomes and improve the quality of life, our Parliament has approved a poverty reduction strategy paper. This document is aimed at an increase in the real income of the population, a just distribution of the benefits of economic growth, the strengthening of targeted assistance, the expansion of private initiatives for the creation of jobs, increasing access by the poorer social strata to health and education, and an enhancement in the quality of management and security.

A decisive factor in the country's population growth rate is the birth rate, which makes up for any losses caused by natural population decline or emigration. Population growth in Tajikistan is thus ensured, with between 190,000 to 200,000 children born every year. In recent years, we have seen a stable downward trend in the birth rate, going from 34.2 births per thousand to 27.9 per thousand.

A high growth rate has an impact not only on the age structure of the population, but also on the size of the family. Families with many children are in a less advantageous situation, materially speaking, than those with fewer children, and they have a higher risk of winding up below the poverty level.

One of the major problems in the country is infant mortality. The primary causes of infant mortality, according to the 2008 data, are infectious and parasitic diseases, which account for 35.4 per cent of infant mortality, respiratory illnesses, which account for 28.3 per cent, and perinatal problems, which account for 20.1 per cent.

Another health problem for the population of Tajikistan is the area of women's reproductive health, in particular the high maternal mortality rate. According to data from the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Tajikistan, the maternal mortality rate in 2008 was 43 per 100,000 live births.

Migration has had a strong impact on the shaping and development of our population. At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a considerable outflow of population from Tajikistan, primarily from large and industrially developed cities, where there was a high percentage of non-indigenous inhabitants. Every year, 100,000 individuals emigrated.

Now, migration involving changing one's place of residence has stabilized. The outflow from the Republic has dropped by a factor of five, reaching about 10,400 people in 2008. In the period from 1994 to 1998, there was an exodus of approximately 280,000 highly educated and qualified people. This undoubtedly had a serious impact on the social and economic situation in the country and, consequently, on the living standards of the entire population, in particular children. Currently, the major reasons for emigration are study, job opportunities and low income level. As a result, we are seeing some temporary emigration in search of jobs, primarily to Russia. This accounts for more than 500,000 migrants.

The employment problem in the Republic of Tajikistan, as a country of labour surpluses, is one of the central issues in our national poverty reduction strategy paper. The development of market relations has led to a restructuring of the economy. Jobs in the State sector were quickly reduced and people had to find work in the growing private sector and through entrepreneurship. The number of gainfully employed in the country grew by 17.5 per cent from 1994 to 2008. The number of those employed grew by 16.9 per cent and accounted for 2,160,000 people by 2008. We have also seen a rise in the nominal wage in the Republic.

The high birth rate and high number of children in families has a direct impact on the economic and social situation of families, on women's employment and on the level of their education. There are over 3.6 million women in Tajikistan — that is, women account for 49.8 per cent of the population. My country attaches great significance to women's reproductive health and safe motherhood, as confirmed by work to establish a new approach to reproductive health and issues of human rights.

The Government has ratified international legal instruments on the rights of women and children, has created new institutions to manage State policy on population and development and is monitoring on an ongoing basis the implementation of national programmes and strategies. All of this has enabled us to analyse the situation in the area of reproductive health. Taking into account the current situation and the state of reproductive health among the population, and in order to ensure a comprehensive approach to improving activities in the fields of reproductive health and family planning, the Government of the Republic

of Tajikistan approved in 2004 a strategic plan for reproductive health for the period leading up to 2014.

The extremely poorly developed network of institutions providing maternal and child health care has contributed to the development of such negative phenomena as anaemia among the population. A great deal of attention is currently being paid to training and retraining medical personnel in the area of reproductive health and the use of modern contraceptive techniques and new educational programmes. Among the basic efforts aimed at improving reproductive health and ensuring reproductive rights are the efforts aimed at providing quality services and at strengthening the system of immunization and vaccine services.

The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan has chosen a strategy for ensuring safe motherhood through family planning services offered by qualified reproductive health specialists since 1996. There has been a yearly increase in the number of visits to reproductive health centres and other health centres for issues pertaining to family planning, which now account for about 45 per cent of total visits.

In conclusion, the problems and issues that we will discuss jointly at this session are, in our view, highly relevant. Modern solutions are required to improve the social development of the populations of Member States of the United Nations. I am convinced that the decisions adopted by the Assembly will form the basis for mutual cooperation, which, in turn, will promote dynamic economic development in all our States.

The challenges of solving unemployment, providing health care, protecting maternal health and other important issues are addressed in the national development strategy of Tajikistan, which was drawn up on the basis of the Millennium Development Goals and is an extremely important strategic document for our Government. At the present time, all of our efforts are aimed at the implementation of that national strategy.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Ms. Vita Skilling, Minister for Health and Social Affairs of the Federated States of Micronesia, who will make a statement on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum.

Ms. Skilling (Federated States of Micronesia): As we mark the fifteenth anniversary of the International

Conference on Population and Development, I am pleased to make this statement on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum countries — Australia, the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

We would like to reiterate our strong and unequivocal support for the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), adopted in Cairo in 1994; the five-year review of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, which culminated in the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly, held in New York in 1999; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) endorsed in 2000; the 2005 World Summit Outcome; and the expanded MDG targets and indicators contained in the MDG monitoring framework adopted by this body.

While we acknowledge the significant progress Pacific Island member countries have made since 1994 towards achieving the goals of the ICPD Programme of Action, there are a number of critical issues of particular relevance to our region that require urgent attention from our Pacific Island countries and national and international partners.

Recognizing the importance of building on current national and regional initiatives and having made progress on the commitments so far, we would like to reiterate our support for these commitments and to assure the international community that we are working towards achieving our targets. In this respect, we would highlight in particular the Cairns Compact on Strengthening Development Coordination in the Pacific, adopted by the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum in August 2009 and endorsed by their development partners; the Pacific Policy Framework for achieving universal access to reproductive health services and commodities, which was developed and endorsed by the Pacific Ministers of Health in Fiji in November 2008; the Madang Declaration made by the Ministers of Health in Papua New Guinea in 2009; the regional declarations made by Pacific parliamentarians since 2003 on combating HIV and on addressing the issues facing youth; the revised 2004 Pacific Platform for Action; the Pacific Plan; and other relevant population and gender declarations and commitments.

We acknowledge that preventable maternal mortality and morbidity constitutes the greatest health inequity. It is an indicator of social injustice and could constitute a violation of human rights. While the Pacific Island member States have undertaken strategies for accelerated action to address maternal mortality and morbidity, some countries in the Pacific still experience unacceptable, avoidable maternal deaths owing to the inability of women to access relevant services, including family planning, in a timely manner. Special action is urgently needed in some countries to ensure access to quality prenatal, postnatal and emergency obstetric care for all mothers and voluntary family planning services, regardless of an individual's socio-economic, educational and demographic status or geographic residence.

Given the high rates of unintended teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and the expanding HIV epidemic in the Pacific, and despite the action taken by our member countries and partners to date, there is an increasingly urgent need to support universal access to reproductive health information, services and commodities. Key to achieving this is a focus on strengthening health systems and addressing inequities, with particular attention devoted to vulnerable groups and underserved populations, including young people.

While significant progress has been made in addressing youth issues, there is a need for sustained national action to ensure youth involvement in policy making and programming, especially in sexual and reproductive health issues, through information, education and youth-friendly services, with a particular focus on reducing unintended pregnancies, HIV infections and sexually transmitted infections.

We acknowledge that our region is slow in making progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment and that, to date, it has a lower percentage of parliamentary seats occupied by women than any other region in the world. There are also other challenges. Endemic violence against women and girls in some communities poses a significant risk to human security and undermines our efforts to end poverty in our region. Recognizing the high prevalence of violence against women and its associated negative long-term consequences for women, their families and communities in the region, we would like to call the attention of the General Assembly to the need for increased and sustained national action to eradicate

sexual and gender-based violence. We want to see an end to permissive community attitudes concerning this problem, and to ensure that all individuals have equal protection by law and equal access to justice.

Finally, adapting to the impacts of climate change is an urgent challenge facing us all, particularly Pacific island countries. Sustainable development activities and measures directly aimed at climate change adaptation are vital to securing livelihoods. It is therefore crucial that climate change be incorporated into the national development strategies of vulnerable countries. We would also like to request urgent and sustained international action to support low-lying Pacific islands in addressing issues of climate change, including population displacement and impacts on human welfare and development, as a matter of international responsibility.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Vanda Pignato, First Lady and Minister of Social Inclusion of El Salvador.

Ms. Pignato (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am immensely gratified at the opportunity to take part in this special meeting, at which the pre-eminent multilateral global Organization is celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the holding of the International Conference on Population and Development and of its main outcome, the Programme of Action adopted on that occasion (see A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1).

That event was an important one in the history of the United Nations because it laid out a broader vision and provided an in-depth look at problems related to population and development. The Conference, the debates that took place and its legacy undoubtedly constitute a turning point on this matter. Indeed, since then there has been a growing awareness that, as noted in the first chapter of the 1994 Programme of Action, population, poverty, production and consumption patterns and the environment are very closely interconnected, such that none of them can be considered in isolation.

The issue of development is no longer seen as something that is merely economic; indeed, social considerations have become an integral part of the concept of development. In terms of the causes and effects of development, population issues are no longer seen as a statistical data set from which to spin abstractions, but rather a defining aspect in the lives of

men and women around the world and of the problems they face.

The Conference's new perspective on man's relationship to his environment made ecology a household word around the world. Attention was drawn to the plight of so-called minorities and vulnerable and oppressed groups within countries, thus promoting equity policies around the world. The need to adopt a gender-based approach was highlighted as an essential part of any analysis or solution to the problems that afflict our planet. The concept of diversity was not invented at the Conference but was re-validated as an indispensable cultural part of the relationship between human beings and between nations and continents. Fresh light was shed on the issue of international migration as a phenomenon made possible by globalization, with a decisive emphasis on development. Lastly, the lucid and global treatment of these and other very important topics made an impact that is still felt today. The recommendations made and agreements achieved at the Conference are therefore a part of the main public policies of many States.

Unfortunately, 15 years have passed and the concrete results of the Programme of Action have been slow to manifest themselves. They have been surpassed by the increasing awareness of these issues on the part of younger generations around the world. In that respect, this commemoration is an urgent reminder to continue our efforts to reach those pending goals. It is also a wake-up call to countries, Governments, international cooperation agencies and donor countries to continue their efforts beyond the 20-year threshold that we originally set out and to ensure that compliance with that deadline becomes a reality.

That means that all of us — national and international stakeholders, non-governmental organizations and other institutions, the academic world and intellectuals — must combine our efforts so that this increased awareness leads to actions aimed at the formulation and adoption of human rights laws and full respect for these rights in their most comprehensive definition.

I come from a small country in a region afflicted by inequality, poverty, exclusion and resource scarcity, and ravaged by insecurity and crime due to the destabilizing forces of drug trafficking and organized crime. We are far from achieving the minimal threshold of dignity in daily life, even though our current efforts

are firmly aimed at achieving basic guarantees in terms of human rights for all, in particular in terms of food, health, education and housing — in other words, at achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which overlap considerably with the Programme of Action.

We are making serious efforts to achieve standards of social conduct that are based on respect for diversity and that foster tolerance of all kinds. An example of such efforts is the Ciudad Mujer project, which my country's Government established to bolster the empowerment and rights of women.

One could say that this is a problem that belongs to my country and my region — that we should be the ones to address and resolve the problems that I have mentioned here. While that is partly true, it is also a serious mistake. The problems of a region and its peoples are the problems of the entire international community. Inequalities within and between countries are an unresolved matter and an open wound that is felt by the vast majority of the world, who seek to live in solidarity with each other and in humane conditions.

We have great faith in the work of the Organization. That is why we believe that United Nations participation and control, through its different bodies for policy implementation, must be greater and must be proactive. I am thinking in particular of the origin and consequences of the international financial crisis that was unleashed a few months ago, which most affected the smallest countries and the weakest economies.

In addition, in terms of population, I would like to point out that we still have to make considerable efforts to ensure the human rights of a growing part of our global society, that is, older persons. The population of older persons is growing in all countries. Policies to provide care and assistance for them are frankly lacking in our societies. This is a highly vulnerable sector of the population that requires special attention, as has already been acknowledged with regard to other sectors and population groups.

In the Americas, we have taken an important initial step in terms of so-called soft law initiatives, notably with the adoption of the Brazilian declaration on the rights of older persons, which serves as a guide for the steps we must take. Its adoption was followed by three meetings, the last of which took place last week in Santiago, Chile. Moreover, on the international level, we have begun by adopting the Madrid Political

Declaration and International Plan of Action on Ageing.

I know that I share that concern with most of the members here. I would therefore like to take this opportunity, on behalf of El Salvador, to call for the steps at the United Nations necessary to strengthen the protection, promotion and full enjoyment of the rights of older persons.

I should like to reiterate that the Cairo Programme of Action continues to be relevant. In fact, 15 years following its adoption, it is more important than ever. We must continue to work to implement it. This means that we must work to make the Programme of Action a reality and a permanent component of human rights to guide the efforts of our global multilateral Organization.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Mario Aoun, Minister of Social Affairs of Lebanon.

Mr. Aoun (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to convey our gratitude to Ms. Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, for her statement.

The repercussions of the global economic crisis are still being felt today as we commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the convening of the International Conference on Population and Development. The impact of that crisis poses a growing threat to all countries, but especially to developing countries. Today's meeting is also taking place against the backdrop of a more serious crisis, that of food. Demographic statistics reveal that the number of people living in poverty or extreme poverty is continuing to increase to unprecedented levels throughout the world. That has further widened the social gap and worsened inequalities between social groups. There has also been a decrease in the number of jobs, as well as a rise in unemployment throughout the world following massive layoffs. In addition to those crises, we also face even more challenging health and environmental problems that have the potential to worsen people's living conditions by undermining efforts to achieve social development.

We are all aware of the fact that carrying out demographic and development studies and analysing demographic trends are key to developing an international strategy to help us to emerge from the

economic crisis and mitigate its effects by preventing threats and making it possible to resolve health, environmental and social problems in the world's societies. All of that compels us to intensify our efforts and to enhance international cooperation in order to establish a climate conducive to progress in achieving the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development and in addressing the challenges we face and the obstacles to progress.

Carrying out a review of demographic issues and their impact on development is more important than ever, in particular following the global economic crisis. That entails identifying priorities and reconsidering goals so that they meet the needs of regional and international societies to achieve human development and contain the recent crises.

The international community is continuing to work tirelessly to end war and conflict, given their negative impact on achieving the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development. However, the fact that certain countries are continuing to defy the will and decisions of the international community and to endanger the stability and security of certain societies through their actions could undermine the chances for implementing social development goals by eroding basic conditions for a decent life, which could serve to sow the seeds of a social revolution that could endanger social stability and security.

Despite all the difficulties Lebanon has faced, including in particular the consequences of Israel's war against it in July 2006, as well as the threats confronting us today, my country has endeavoured to implement the goals of the Conference. We have done so despite our very modest means. We would not have been able to achieve tangible human development results, which have exceeded our economic performance, without assistance from some international organizations, the private sector and friendly countries. Our results are contributing to improved public health conditions, addressing certain health problems affecting certain sectors of the population and improved reproductive health. There have also been tangible results in ensuring primary education for all, increasing enrolment rates in both high school and post-secondary education and bridging the gap between male and female student.

We have also made strides in the area of gender equality and in ensuring increased awareness by women of their rights and their participation in economic and political life.

We have also had success in reducing poverty by addressing its causes. We have provided assistance to families living in poverty or extreme poverty by establishing a programme and adopting a plan of action at the Ministry for Health and Social Affairs, working together with international organizations and private groups.

Achieving the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development could contribute to resolving various development and demographic problems and issues. In prioritizing those goals, we must bear in mind the demands of current international emergencies. We therefore call for greater involvement by Government entities, international and regional organizations and civil society groups working on development and population issues. That involvement should help us to achieve the goals by making the necessary political and legislative changes at the national, regional and international levels to address the relevant issues.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Gandi Tugsjargal, Minister for Social Protection and Labour of Mongolia.

Ms. Tugsjargal (Mongolia) (*spoke in Khalkha Mongol, English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the Government of Mongolia and my delegation, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the United Nations, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other organizers of these special meetings to focus global attention on population and development issues.

Fifteen years have passed since the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. We have gathered here today for the third time at our regular venue to review global achievements, constraints and lessons learned in the area of population and development, as well as to identify challenges in fulfilling goals and objectives of the ICPD in the coming five-year period.

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development was a watershed event that produced a concrete and detailed plan based on international consensus in this area. Since then the international

community and national Governments have made sustained efforts for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action (see A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1).

We are pleased to see that the Cairo agenda has not remained a promise but has been translated into concrete initiatives, policies, laws and programmes, at international and national levels, that are having substantial impacts on the well-being of millions of people across the world. It is also worth noting that many developing countries have made major progress towards attaining objectives set out in the ICPD Programme of Action.

Yet we all know that major gaps remain in the Programme's implementation. We are also confronting various new and emerging challenges that are causing setbacks in efforts to achieve the established goals and objectives. Current food, fuel and financial crises, global warming and, in some regions, armed conflicts have adversely affected the well-being of people in one way or another. Therefore, my delegation is looking forward to identifying the right strategies to address these challenges and gaps through this global review exercise.

National efforts and actions are instrumental for the implementation of the ICPD agenda. Mongolia has made substantial progress in its implementation. The ICPD principles have been reflected in key policy documents such as the National Population Development Policy, the Health Sector Master Plan, the National Reproductive Health Programmes, the National Gender Equality Programme and the Law on Combating Domestic Violence.

Many issues on the agenda of the Programme of Action have been linked to the national Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) endorsed by the Parliament of Mongolia in 2005, which facilitated the achievement of the national targets for the reduction of maternal mortality by 2015. I am pleased to report that Mongolia has considerably reduced maternal and child mortality in recent years. Also, we are making progress in the provision of reproductive health and education services for adolescents. In this regard, I wish to thank UNFPA for its continued support and excellent collaboration with the Government of Mongolia in making such progress.

The Government of Mongolia consistently increased the public budget for basic social services, including health and education, when the country's

economy was growing at a faster rate, during the years 2006 to 2008. In the light of the current economic slowdown, the Government is committed to maintaining the progress achieved and to continuing investments in the health and education sectors.

Despite those achievements and progress, there is much work to do on the population and development agenda. We are committed to continuing our efforts to reduce poverty, address migration-related issues and provide better basic social services for disadvantaged groups. In addition, more attention should be paid to such emerging challenges as population ageing, trafficking in women and children and intensified urbanization.

I wish to take this opportunity to report that national stakeholders, in collaboration with UNFPA, successfully organized a national forum last September, in the course of which we analysed our progress, constraints and lessons learned in the area of population and development and identified the main challenges ahead, along with ways to tackle them.

Today we are holding a substantive discussion on challenges in the area of population and development. We have been living with a multitude of crises in different sectors. We are witnessing how those crises have affected the livelihoods of millions of people around the world. As a developing country Mongolia has been seriously affected by the current global economic and financial crisis and is currently coping with its negative consequences. It is a real threat to the full implementation of the ICPD agenda and the MDGs.

It is indeed true that no country in the world can overcome the crisis on its own, even if it is investing all its efforts to that end. For that reason, in this time of economic interdependence, close cooperation at the regional and subregional levels and among neighbouring countries is crucial to recover from the crisis within the shortest possible period.

In moving from crisis to crisis we have learned that it is crucial to develop and strengthen reliable and sustainable systems to ensure income security, accessible health services and education for all, not only in times of crisis but also during non-crisis periods. In particular, health, unemployment and old-age safety nets must be improved. The United Nations and its funds and organizations should enhance their

technical assistance to the developing countries in those areas.

The complex challenges, both existing and emerging, in the areas of population and development should be addressed with new and creative approaches at both the international and national levels. For example, international migration is of particular concern for both origin and destination nations. The situation has been further complicated by uneven capacities — or, in most cases, the lack of any capacity — to develop policy and carry out appropriate management of the issues at hand. Therefore, I wish to see the United Nations play a greater role in this area.

I would like to conclude my speech by reaffirming, on behalf of the Government of Mongolia, our commitment to invest all our efforts to achieve the objectives of the ICPD.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jean-Marie Ehouzou, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Benin.

Mr. Ehouzou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): We are meeting in New York today, 12 October 2009, during the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly, to commemorate a major event for all Member States of our Organization, in particular for African populations, namely, the fifteenth anniversary of the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Indeed, in the course of those important international meetings in 1994, 179 participating Governments adopted a 20-year programme that is evaluated every five years.

The efforts made from year to year since then have made us aware of the fact that population, poverty, problems stemming from our habits of production and consumption, and threats to the environment are questions so closely linked that none can be dealt with individually. The Conference also marked a new degree of understanding among those working to promote international development about the indissoluble link between population and development.

The ICPD Programme of Action (see A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1) spells out the specific objectives to be implemented by all countries. One of the most important is the integration of population questions into strategies, planning, the decision-making process and the allocation of development resources at

every level and in every region. The aim here is to satisfy the needs and improve the quality of life of present and future generations.

Today we can reaffirm that the 15 years of Programme implementation have made possible notable demographic, social, economic, ecological and political changes in most of the countries that committed to it. There has been distinct progress in the areas of access to reproductive health care, declining birth and mortality rates, raising education and income levels and improving educational systems and the legal and socio-economic status of women.

In my country, Benin, we launched bold initiatives following the Cairo Conference to implement the Programme of Action, as demonstrated by the adoption in May 1996 of a declaration on population policy, which has provided us with a national framework of reference in this area. Since April 2006 the Government of Boni Yayi, President of the Republic of Benin, has adopted numerous measures and taken important steps in areas related to that commitment. Allow me to mention a few of them here.

Socio-demographic surveys have been conducted, of which the most recent was a modular survey of household living conditions. We have developed policies and plans of action that integrate population questions. We have strengthened capacity and analysis in the area of gender equality, improved the legal status and laws governing the condition of women and developed micro-finance as an effective economic instrument for the empowerment of women. We have adopted regulations in the legal, economic, legislative, strategic and institutional areas aimed at enhancing the well-being of the family, the basic unit of society, and at promoting equality of opportunity within families. A new family code has been adopted. We are strengthening action in the areas of employment, reproductive health and children's rights to health and, for those under five years old, to schooling and literacy, with the support of development partners. We are intensifying the fight against HIV/AIDS, resulting in a significant reduction in the prevalence of this disease.

We pay a heartfelt tribute to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for the very effective and balanced support it has given Benin in dealing with the issues within its sphere of competence, where we have shown encouraging — though still insufficient —

results. We hope to be able to continue to benefit from dynamic international cooperation with all our development partners to meet the numerous challenges that confront us in our efforts to achieve the goals of the ICPD.

Those challenges include, among others, access to better reproductive health services, capacity strengthening, caring for street children, and integrating environmental concerns into all sectors of national life. Such challenges continue to be a heavy burden on social requirements, particularly in the areas of nutrition, education, health, employment, housing, urban management and the availability of production elements. Those challenges are increasing, and, given the deterioration of the current international context, they threaten to wipe out the gains made.

We know the extent to which the present financial crisis has compounded the energy, food and environmental crises and is seriously affecting the situation of a number of developing countries in general and those of the least developed countries, of which Benin is one, in particular. Poverty is growing in the continent of Africa much faster than anywhere else, and I would like to appeal to the developed countries to increase their support of developing countries in difficulty.

Benin also supports the recommendations and measures in the Secretary-General's report entitled "Africa's development needs: state of implementation of various commitments, challenges and the way forward" (A/64/208). They emphasize strengthening the continent's capacity to deal with the effects of the crises and preserve the gains that have been made. Therefore we should be able to present acceptable results of the comprehensive implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action in five years. It goes without saying that the progress we will have made here will help us move towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

To be sure, the forecasts made by authoritative analysts acknowledge that those objectives can be compromised by current problems. But we must give the lie to such forecasts. To do so, we need greater solidarity, determination and consistency in the steps we undertake to achieve our goals.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Sugiri Syarief, Minister of

the National Family Planning Coordinating Board of Indonesia.

Mr. Syarief (Indonesia): Let me begin by expressing to you my delegation's sincere appreciation, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting to commemorate the International Conference on Population and Development Cairo (ICPD) consensus, after 15 years of its implementation. We also welcome your statement, which truly emphasized the strategic importance of the issue at hand. The significance of this meeting is also reflected by the presence of the Secretary-General. We acknowledge and appreciate his joining us for the review. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for her remarks and for the relentless support shown by the entire agency for the issue of population and development.

We are not here just to review the progress made in implementing the Conference's Programme of Action (see A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1) but also to chart the course for future implementation over the next five years.

As the world's fourth most populous nation, with 231.4 million people, Indonesia attaches great importance to issues pertaining to population and development. We have made considerable strides in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action within the context of the Millennium Development Goals development framework. The details of my full report are in the Indonesian Country Report document, which is before the Assembly.

For Indonesia, implementation has been linked to population policies and programmes that constitute an integral part of the Long-Term Development Plan (2005-2025) and Medium-Term Development Plan (2010-2014). As part of our population and development law, the ICPD Programme of Action has been the guiding light for action in that regard. The overall objective of Indonesia's population policy is to enhance population quality, manage population size and growth, guide population mobility and improve population information systems.

Fifteen years after the Cairo Conference, we can tell the Assembly that Indonesia has achieved significant progress. So far, one of the main results of our implementation efforts has been a sharp reduction in the number of people who must survive on less than

\$1 a day. Thus Indonesia has achieved one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Now the challenge for the country is to reduce the number of those struggling to survive on \$2 per day. The aim is to equip them in such a way so that they do not easily fall below the national poverty line in the event of another economic crisis.

Part of our national poverty reduction strategy is to improve school enrolment rates — especially those of girls and women, so that they can be part of an educated workforce capable of meeting the needs of the labour market. Because of that strategy, enrolment rates have increased considerably. As revealed by selected indicators, such as the gender-related human development index and the gender empowerment measure, women are deriving substantial benefits from the strategy. We are also addressing occupational stereotypes that limit the horizons of women at the lower socio-economic levels.

In addition, work is being done to eliminate other obstacles that are hindering the advancement of women. Action is being taken to protect the rights of working women, particularly those who work overseas; to narrow the gender gap in education, especially intermediate and tertiary education; to reduce the high maternal mortality rate; to halt domestic violence; and to prevent the trafficking of women and girls.

Nothing better demonstrates the urgent need for decisive action to help women than the issue of safe motherhood in Indonesia. Approximately 9,800 women die each year as a result of pregnancy and delivery complications. In response, a maternal health programme focusing on improving cost-effective access to and the availability of high-quality maternal health services is being brought into operation. We have also strengthened cross-sector and cross-programme cooperation and empowered families and communities. We have improved planning coordination and activities, including advocacy, to ensure safer pregnancy and child survival. Further, we have optimized the allocation of funds and enhanced programme management through surveillance, monitoring and evaluation.

On another important front for women — family planning — we are also making progress. We are currently engaged in revitalizing our family planning programme, even as unfavourable social and political changes at the global level have affected it. More

women and couples can now choose the number and spacing of their children through family planning. Indonesia is also beginning to end rapid population growth and to keep its fertility rate close to replacement level. At present, the fertility rate is 2.34. In addition, infant mortality is declining in most provinces, having been reduced to 34 per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality rate in 2007 was 228 per 100,000 live births, which is close to the objective set out in our medium-term development plan, although we may not achieve the MDG target by 2015.

As part of that thrust, Indonesia is committed to the promotion of reproductive health and reproductive rights. Women can avail themselves of comprehensive reproductive health education and services. In the area of adolescent reproductive health, we have integrated relevant issues into our national development strategy since 2000. The main focus of the adolescent programme is to provide teenage girls and boys with reproductive health information and counselling related to gender equality, responsible sexual behaviour and the prevention of unwanted pregnancy, avoiding drug abuse and acquiring life skills.

However, efforts to achieve reproductive health goals are being hindered by the spread of HIV/AIDS in Indonesia. Indonesia is seeing an alarming increase in the infection rate, and therefore we are exploring various ways and means to combat HIV/AIDS in a comprehensive manner. More life-saving drugs are reaching people living with HIV/AIDS. We have adopted measures to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission and have taken steps to ensure that HIV prevention and treatment services are available in all health-care settings.

Much more remains to be done, and that is why Indonesia has welcomed international support in reaching its population-related goals. Thus, our initiative in establishing Partners in Population and Development: a South-South Initiative has been very helpful in terms of building capacity and gaining access to the funds and technical expertise provided by the international donor community.

As a result of the challenges associated with implementing the ICPD Programme of Action over the past 15 years, Indonesia has learned many valuable lessons. First, whatever the challenges may be, implementation efforts and commitment must not weaken at any level. Secondly, the Programme of

Action can be implemented only if sufficient human and financial resources are mobilized for that purpose. Thirdly, national institutional capacities must be strengthened through a diversity of mixed partnerships. Following those three principles, Indonesia expects to make broader and deeper progress in achieving the goals of the Programme of Action.

Finally, as a means of accelerating future progress, it is important that these special meetings of the General Assembly concentrate on building consensus among Member States concerning financing for the Programme of Action and the availability of additional expertise to help developing countries.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I next give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Shashi Tharoor, Minister of State for External Affairs of India.

Mr. Tharoor (India): As I am speaking for the first time in the General Assembly as representative of India, please allow me, Sir, to congratulate you on your election as President of the General Assembly. We look forward to working under your leadership.

I am honoured and privileged to participate in today's open debate to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which was a major international initiative on an issue of critical importance to India.

The International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, was a landmark conference. Overcoming deep divisions among Member States, it succeeded in forging an unprecedented global consensus and integrated the diverse range of population, development and human rights issues into a blueprint for 20 years of action, popularly known as the Cairo consensus.

The Programme of Action (see A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1) addressed the complex interrelationships among population, economic growth and sustainable development, as well as population distribution, gender equality and the empowerment of women, urbanization, migration, data collection and analysis. For the first time, population and development issues were dealt with in a holistic manner and individual human beings were placed at the very heart of the development process. There was a substantive effort to clarify the concept of reproductive rights and the Programme also emphasized the

centrality of reproductive health. It also acknowledged the central role of women and young people in the development process.

In my own country, this led to a shift in the Government's approach towards population stabilization from being target-based to being one based on making informed and voluntary choices. The Cairo consensus provided much of the groundwork for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which have now become the benchmark indicators for socio-economic development.

I would like to pay tribute today to two women leaders of the United Nations system, who have also been friends and close colleagues of mine: Ms. Nafis Sadik of Pakistan, Secretary-General of the Cairo Conference and a long-serving and effective leader of the United Nations Population Fund, and Ms. Thoraya Obaid of Saudi Arabia, Ms. Sadik's dynamic and dedicated successor. Their work in promoting the rights of women remains indispensable to the future of our planet. India is proud to applaud and support their efforts.

Today's event offers us an invaluable opportunity to comprehensively review the progress made so far and analyse the challenges that lie ahead. The statements of the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly have underscored the critical importance of realizing the vision set out 15 years ago. A review would indicate that the global achievements have been mixed at best. There have been slippages internationally as well as in many countries, including my own. It is a matter of regret that, globally, we are still far from realizing the goal of universal primary education; infant and child mortality and maternal mortality rates continue to remain high; and access to universal reproductive health is still distant in many parts of the world.

Nevertheless, it is my firm belief that these goals are still achievable. Resolute political will and concerted global action are needed to realize these goals. The benchmarks set by the ICPD continue to highlight the onerous task ahead for all of us.

India has been making a steady progress towards realizing the vision of the ICPD and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Despite the global economic slowdown, the Government of India has accorded very high priority to the education and health

sectors, and has enhanced allocation by 19 per cent to the social sector during the current financial year.

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), launched in 2005, is one of the biggest interventions of its kind in the health sector in the world. The NRHM seeks to significantly upgrade effective health care throughout India, covering over 600 million people. It aims to improve the access of rural people, especially poor women and children, to equitable, affordable, accountable and effective primary health care.

The reproductive and child health programme is one of the main components of the NRHM, and includes the ambitious programme of Janani Suraksha Yojana, a safe-motherhood intervention to promote institutional delivery with specific focus on poor pregnant women. So far, this Programme has benefited more than 10 million women and has emerged as a major successful intervention in reducing maternal and infant mortality. As Ms. Obaid reminded us, no woman should die giving life.

In statistical terms, India's infant mortality rate is 55 per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality ratio declined from 301 in the period 2001-2003 to 254 in the period 2004-2006. These are areas that require major attention on our part, and our Government is seized of the problem. As regards the incidence of HIV/AIDS, it remains under 1 per cent and is showing signs of reaching a plateau.

India's family planning programme is one of the oldest in the world. It is based on the voluntary and informed choice and consent of citizens in availing themselves of reproductive health-care services. The programme aims at achieving population stabilization by addressing unmet needs through decentralized planning and programme implementation. At primary health-care institutions, there has been an integration of the HIV/AIDS programme with reproductive health care.

India's eleventh plan recognizes that the development of children is at the centre of the plan. This abiding policy commitment to an integrated approach to enhancing young child survival, growth, development and early learning is being translated into action through the Integrated Child Development Services Universalization with Quality initiative. The Integrated Child Development Services is today the world's largest early childhood development programme, reaching out to over 78 million young

children and pregnant and lactating mothers. There is added emphasis on convergence of services under various schemes and programmes, including health, early childhood education and safe drinking water, so as to achieve the desired impact.

India has also embarked on ambitious programmes for human resource development. The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan — "Education for All" — campaign, launched in the year 2000, is a major national intervention towards achieving universal primary education and allowing us to reap the benefits of a demographic dividend from a young population. This year, the Government of India has brought into force the Right to Education Act. The Act aims to guarantee to each child, up to the age of 14, the right to education. The Government has also launched a female literacy mission this year with the aim of reducing female illiteracy by half in the next three years.

Gender equity and empowerment have been guiding principles in the development policies of the Government of India. India's planning process is fully committed to enabling women to be equal partners in development. Gender budgeting has been introduced across all sectors.

We have also moved on empowering women in the area of governance and decision-making. The seventy-third and seventy-fourth constitutional amendments introduced the provision of one-third reservation of seats for women in local self-government institutions in India. We now have the distinction of having the largest number of women representatives in local Government in the world and some three million of them hold elected office in my country.

In these difficult times, when the world is still grappling with the adverse effects of an unprecedented global economic and financial crisis, developing countries, where the crisis did not originate, have been the most affected. This threatens to undermine and even reverse the gains made so far in their arduous journey of development. Therefore, the need for donors to honour their pledges and the international community to keep up the stimulus and other efforts to spur the economies of developing countries cannot be overemphasized.

The Government of India remains firmly committed to realizing the vision set out in Cairo 15 years ago and to fulfilling the MDGs by 2015. While

we shall certainly do all that we can domestically and within our capacities with our partners in the South, it is imperative that the international community meet its commitments in the global partnership that is critical for a better quality of life for all of us on our shared planet.

The President: I call on Mr. Joakim Stymne, State Secretary of Sweden.

Mr. Stymne (Sweden): On behalf of the European Union (EU), I am honoured to address the General Assembly on the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The following countries align themselves with this statement: Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Iceland, Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia.

The International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, was a groundbreaking event, placing the individual at the core of population and development issues. It helped us to understand better how States and all of us, as women and men, must reach out to each other and work together to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women. We moved away from a focus on the number of people to focus on human rights, and we laid the groundwork for a new global consensus on population and development.

Over the past 15 years, progress has been made in moving the Cairo agenda forward. Universal access to reproductive health has become part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Infant and child mortality have declined. More girls can attend school; more women and couples have access to means to plan their families, space pregnancies and limit the number of children if they so wish; and the response to HIV and AIDS has been expanded and strengthened. Many countries have endorsed national policies, laws and programmes to improve women's health and their enjoyment of human rights, and have embraced the recommendations of the ICPD. Governments have recognized the importance of population data and analysis as a basis for development strategies, policies and programmes.

Despite the progress made, we still face many challenges. The effects of the global financial and economic downturn are being felt in many parts of the

world. Poverty is still one of our most serious concerns, and more than 1 billion people still suffer from hunger, 884 million people lack access to safe drinking water, and over 2.5 billion people lack access to basic sanitation. Climate change impacts, from rising sea levels to drought and other weather-related disasters, are affecting our living conditions, including migration movements. Education is a key factor in sustainable development, and universal access to education, as outlined in the Programme of Action (see A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1), is fundamental to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs.

It is of global concern that the crises have aggravated the already severe conditions for the poorest, including social infrastructure. There is no doubt that the current situation has reversed recent gains. It is alarming that many families that were moving out of poverty are being plunged back into it again despite their own best efforts. Among those particularly affected are women, young people and groups that were already in vulnerable situations, marginalized and disadvantaged in terms of power. Girls are the first to be pulled out of school when resources are lacking.

International migration is a vital part of today's globalized existence. Global communications and transportation have made it possible for people to enjoy more freedom of movement than ever before. There are clear linkages between migration and development. Remittances are one example of the benefits of migration for the migrant's country of origin. Remittances increase the diversity of family income sources, help to ensure against risks, make investments in education and health possible, and provide a source of capital for the establishment of small enterprises in developing countries. However, with today's financial and economic downturn, that source of income for many poor people around the world is threatened.

The EU is committed to promoting the positive synergies between migration and development. The aim of the EU's Global Approach to Migration, adopted in 2005, is to increase coherence among various policy areas in order to realize the potential of human mobility. The three pillars of the Global Approach — promoting mobility and legal migration, optimizing the link between migration and development, and combating irregular immigration —

must all be pursued in a coherent manner. The Global Approach, as well as the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, adopted in July 2008, will be implemented in true partnership with countries of origin, transit and destination.

International dialogue on migration and development has deepened in recent years. After the United Nations High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development in 2006, international dialogue has continued in the Global Forum on Migration and Development. The first meeting of the State-led, informal and voluntary Global Forum was held in Brussels in 2007 and the second in Manila in 2008. The third meeting will take place in Athens from 4 to 5 November this year.

Migration is, among other factors, a significant contribution to urbanization as people move in search of social and economic opportunities. The proportion of people living in urban areas will continue to increase in the future. That population shift poses new socio-economic challenges to developing countries. Rapid urban growth strains the capacity of local and national Governments to provide basic services, such as health care, education, water, electricity and sewage. Development policies are more effective when countries include population dynamics, such as urbanization, in their planning and decision-making.

Women all over the world demand change and insist on opportunities to improve their own situations and the well-being of their families. However, women's political participation and access to decision-making processes are still restricted and women continue to be discriminated against in law and in practice in many parts of the world. Progress in that regard has been too slow. The European Union welcomes the strengthening of the United Nations capacity to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Resolution 63/311, establishing a new gender entity, is an important step towards the realization of the United Nations obligations to women around the world.

Violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, is a major obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development, peace and security. In that connection, we urge that every effort be made to intensify the implementation of Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) in order to ensure compliance with international law, the

effectiveness of conflict resolution, human security, peacebuilding and the fight against impunity for perpetrators.

The EU and its member States have taken important steps to address such violence, including plans of action to implement resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008), and we welcome the newly adopted resolution 1888 (2009) and the important steps to be taken under resolution 1889 (2009) on women and peace and security, which further set the agenda for next year.

The ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action (see A/CONF.177/20/Rev.1) together paved the way for a progressive and forward-looking approach to gender equality, recognizing the importance of women's empowerment and that women's rights are human rights. Men and boys must become fully involved in policy and programme development aiming to improve the equal sharing of responsibilities with women and girls so as to foster changes in attitudes and behaviour patterns in order to promote and protect the human rights of women and the girl child. The Programme of Action highlights the importance of improving communication between women and men on issues of sexuality and reproductive health and the understanding of their joint responsibility.

There is one thing that bears repeating over and over again. On the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action, the EU reaffirms its strong support for and commitment to the Programme's full implementation, as well as for the key actions for its further implementation agreed at the Five-Year Review and Appraisal of the ICPD, and in the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action for Social Development (see A/CONF.166/9).

The EU also emphasizes that gender equality cannot be achieved without guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and reaffirms that expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and health services is essential to achieving the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

In the countdown to 2015 — with only five years remaining — the European Union will accelerate action to guarantee universal access to reproductive health and ensure reproductive health commodity

security. We will continue to work closely with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Governments, civil society and other partners to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as women's empowerment and gender equality, with the aim of achieving the goals set out at relevant international conferences, including the ICPD.

The EU commends the United Nations system — and in particular UNFPA — on its successful efforts to implement a holistic approach, as established in the Programme of Action. The EU recognizes that the right to attain the highest standard of health, including sexual and reproductive health, is a basis for action. The incorporation of the ICPD agenda into national development strategies — especially in national health policies, strategies, programmes and budgets — is a prerequisite for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

This approach is particularly important in view of the fact that, every year, more than half a million women die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth and that little progress has been made over the past 15 years. Most maternal deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. A woman's lifetime risk of maternal death in sub-Saharan Africa is 1 in 22, while in developed countries the risk is less than 1 in 6,000. According to the United Nations, 13 per cent of maternal deaths at the global level are due to unsafe abortions and in parts of sub-Saharan Africa the figure is 30 to 40 per cent. That means we are far from achieving MDG 5 and its targets.

The causes of maternal mortality are well known, and in the vast majority of cases they are preventable. With over 99 per cent of maternal deaths occurring in developing countries, there is an urgent need to address the largest health inequity of our time. We cannot address the issue of maternal mortality unless we adopt a multisectoral approach to protecting the rights of women and girls and take urgent action to strengthen national health systems.

The close connection between health, economic and social well-being is well documented. Disease and ill-health weaken the poor by diminishing their personal capacity and their ability to contribute to their households, resulting in lost incomes and lower productivity.

HIV and AIDS continue to pose a threat to development and the well-being of individuals. Most

new HIV infections are spread through unsafe sex. There is therefore a need to integrate HIV and AIDS and sexual and reproductive health and rights into policies and programmes at the local, regional and international levels. Comprehensive sexuality education and access to youth-friendly health services, affordable and high quality male and female condoms, and other forms of prevention and contraceptives must be part of our response in fighting HIV and AIDS. Special attention to the roles and responsibilities of men is needed.

Over the years, we have learned that, in order to advance the implementation and achievement of the goals of the ICPD Programme of Action, countries and communities must feel ownership and protect the agenda. We cannot stress enough the importance of involving Governments, communities, civil society organizations and civil society as a whole. More importantly, however, women, men, girls and boys must be fully involved in efforts that address their specific situations and challenges.

UNFPA has spearheaded this process by exploring different ways to promote gender equality and human rights so that they are internalized and understood at the community level and by individuals. Change comes from within. Sufficient financial resources, both domestic and international, are vital to achieving the goals set in Cairo. Despite the current economic and financial crisis, the international community must honour the internationally agreed targets for the delivery of official development assistance.

Mr. Christian (Ghana), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Equally important, however, is political will. Giving people the freedom and opportunities they need to grow, to take responsibility, to make informed choices and to fulfil their dreams is the overall objective of the ICPD and our common task. It is not a question of numbers, but something much more important: the rights, well-being and development of each and every individual. That is how we can achieve sustainable human development.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency The Honourable Haja Afsatou Olayinka Kabba, Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources of Sierra Leone.

Ms. Kabba (Sierra Leone): Permit me to reiterate the sentiments expressed by my President, His Excellency Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, on Mr. Treki's election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session when he addressed this Assembly three weeks ago, and to reassure Mr. Treki of the support of the delegation of Sierra Leone. Let me also thank him for convening a meeting on this very important agenda item. My delegation fully associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Ms. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, for the direction she has been giving to this process.

I feel highly honoured to address the Assembly as we join others all around the world in celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). I also wish to recall that Sierra Leone was fully represented at that meeting and was a signatory to the Programme of Action (see A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1) that emanated from it.

We are fully aware that the Programme of Action recognizes the right to development, education, health care — including sexual and reproductive health — the empowerment of women and gender equality as decisive factors needed to facilitate development and reduce poverty. The right to decide freely on the number and spacing of children was reaffirmed as a fundamental right of individuals and couples.

It is now a recognized fact that the ICPD was remarkable in many ways. In the first place, it was able to gather consensus among the nations of the world on many complex development issues facing our world today. In the second place, it established a clear understanding of the interrelationships between population and development and how we can live in a dynamic world that will be sustainable not only for us but also for our future generations.

Despite the current difficult global economic situation, my country, Sierra Leone, has kept itself very much abreast of developments with regard to the ICPD and its Programme of Action. We have always maintained that the ICPD was a watershed that has thrown new light on the linkages between reproductive health and rights and other aspects of development.

Coming from a post-conflict country in a region that is poverty-stricken and characterized by high maternal and infant mortality, we fully agree with all the principles of the ICPD and share the view that the ideas inherent in them are as relevant today as they were valid in 1994. These principles are further strengthened through their incorporation into Millennium Development Goals 3, 5 and 6 and have enabled the Government to focus on its path to development.

In spite of the difficult economic situation in the world today and its effect on my country, I must express my Government's unflinching support for the UNFPA in assisting our local efforts in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action and in reaffirming our commitment to all its ideals.

My Government is now aware that universal access to reproductive health care is necessary to reduce poverty as it increases the possibility of higher investment in human development, sustainable livelihoods and food security. Reproductive health problems disproportionately affect women — especially the poor — and can further impoverish struggling families. When women have access to reproductive health care, including family planning services, they are empowered to have smaller, healthier families and are better able to maintain their own health as well as that of their families.

I must say that, by pursuing the principles of the ICPD, Sierra Leone has made a number of strides since 1994. A National Family Planning Programme was established, and this has now been upgraded to the Reproductive Health Division of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation. The Government has developed a reproductive health strategy and a national reproductive health policy. The reproductive health policy is set within the framework of the national health policy of Sierra Leone, which upholds primary health care as a key strategy for delivering health care in Sierra Leone. This policy recognizes that reproductive health should be conceived of in the context of primary health care, as stated in the ICPD. A reproductive health commodity security strategy and drug-distribution systems have now been put in place. The Government has also recently established a Reproductive and Child Health Directorate to operationalize that strategy.

With the assistance of donors and United Nations agencies, a number of health facilities have been upgraded to strengthen the provision of basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric care for women. The UNFPA has sent a number of doctors, and nurses have been sent for training and retraining in specialized skills within the subregion.

An innovative approach has been the use of community motorized ambulances to transport pregnant women from areas where it is difficult to access transportation to places where there are hospitals or other health facilities for them to access medical care. Women also undertake fund-raising farming activities through gardening. The proceeds from these activities are saved and used to support women during pregnancy and delivery. The establishment of health insurance schemes and birth-waiting homes and the enforcement of by-laws at the community level are some of the innovative things that have been done in my country.

There is also full involvement on the part of traditional and religious leaders, with the leadership of the Office of the First Lady, in advocating for a reduction in maternal mortality. A number of gender laws have been passed to empower women, in particular with regard to marriage and inheritance. A national gender strategic plan has been formulated to enhance gender empowerment and equity.

At the recent state opening of the third session of the third parliament of the Second Republic of Sierra Leone, on 9 October 2009, His Excellency the President, Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, outlined the progress on Government policies and interventions in the health sector. Infant and under-five mortality rates have been reduced significantly. Many more Sierra Leoneans are sleeping under insecticide-treated bed nets than ever before. Maternal mortality rates have fallen by a third over the past three years. Blood banks have been established in all regions of the country. A midwifery school is under construction in the Northern province, and modern medical storage and management facilities are under construction in the capital city and the 12 districts.

The Government is stepping up the fight against HIV/AIDS and has established 337 sites for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission, 103 treatment centres for people living with HIV and 384 volunteer-based confidential and counselling centres.

His Excellency the President further informed parliament that the first priority of the Government is to ensure free access to health care for pregnant women and children under the age of five. The Government will also establish a National Health Commission, separate from the civil service, to institute rules and codes of conduct, as well as to regulate and improve the conditions of service of health workers and the quality of health-care delivery in general.

Our efforts have not proceeded free from challenges. The scarcity of human resources for health care — for emergency obstetric care, in particular — has been a particular challenge. There has never been a full complement of staff in public health units due to brain drain in the medical field. The Government appreciates UNFPA's contribution in the area of training doctors and nurses. Other donors, such as the European Union and the United Kingdom Department for International Development, are also involved in upgrading the capacity of staff within the Ministry of Health. Access to health facilities is also difficult due to bad roads. This is contributing to delays leading to high maternal mortality.

The Government's new targets for reproductive health include, among other things, commitments to improving the reproductive health status of women nationwide by providing more resources, as prioritized in our second poverty reduction strategy, the agenda for change; the development of the Reproductive Health Strategic Plan through joint programming with the United Nations and other donor partners; post-conflict rehabilitation of public health units and maternity wards in hospitals nationwide, which were destroyed during the war; undertaking more capacity-building activities through training and the provision of logistical and material support.

I should like to reiterate my Government's commitment to achieving the goals of the ICPD and the Millennium Development Goals. While we pledge our support to ensure that we achieve these goals, I would be remiss in my duty as an advocate not to appeal to our benefactors that, without their additional financial support, it will be difficult to ensure that no woman will die in giving life. We count on you, and may God bless you all.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Naela Gabr, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Multilateral Affairs of Egypt.

Ms. Gabr (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to say how gratified we are at the convening of these meetings in commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, which was held in Cairo in 1994. I wish also to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his inspiring statement on this occasion. Furthermore, I wish to express also our special thanks to Ms. Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, for her statement today and for the unflagging assistance that the Fund has extended to developing countries in support of their efforts to achieve the goals of the Programme of Action of the Cairo Conference (see A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1). I would also like to associate myself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Sudan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Fifteen years ago, Egypt was pleased to host the first International Conference on Population and Development, reflecting the priority we attach to population issues and their close relation to the international development agenda. In Cairo, the international community reached a consensus that reflects our peoples' aspirations towards the advancement of population issues at the international level. That consensus was premised on enhancing sustainable human development and on asserting the concept of empowering all members of the family by stressing education, health care and gender equality, by providing every opportunity to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental development and by working towards the eradication of poverty.

The International Conference in Cairo thus marked an historic turning point in reaffirming the direct link between population issues, in their many diverse forms, and the achievement of development in its various aspects. The Cairo Programme of Action (see A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1) and the relevant recommendations adopted by the General Assembly in 1999 in resolution 53/183, along with the special outcomes of other major United Nations conferences, have contributed to the formulation of a comprehensive international framework for sustainable development, in the economic, social and environmental fields.

I think that all those who work in this multilateral framework sense the significance of what was achieved in Cairo in thematic, programmatic and intellectual terms. Therefore, it is imperative to utilize our

commemoration today — five years before the set date for the achievement of the Cairo Conference's goals and six years before the target date for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) — to consider and approve the best means to face the huge obstacles to achieving those goals. Those obstacles include the global economic and financial crisis and its impact on developing countries, the interrelated challenges of poverty, armed conflicts and climate change and the energy and food security crises. These and other crises have resulted in additional burdens on developing countries in the form of dwindling economic growth, declining exports and remittance revenues, rising unemployment and a steady increase in the number of those living below the poverty line. All of those factors undermine the gains that developing countries have achieved over the past several years.

From that perspective, Egypt believes that making real progress in achieving the goals of the Programme of Action and the internationally agreed developmental goals depends on the mobilization of the necessary political will to face these crises and challenges and to overcome the implementation gap in the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and decisions on economic and social issues. Therefore, we emphasize that the negative repercussions of the international economic and financial crisis, along with other crises, should constitute yet another compelling reason for developed countries to reaffirm their commitment to support developing nations' efforts to achieve the goals of the Programme of Action and other internationally agreed development goals, particularly the MDGs.

The situation should also spur renewed commitments to support developing countries' capacity to mitigate the negative socio-economic effects of these crises in family and population matters. Particularly, adequate resources should be provided to fund services in family planning, reproductive health and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and to finance research activities, including the collection and analysis of data on population and development policies.

Since hosting the International Conference, as part of Egypt's growing political commitment to participate actively in international efforts aimed at achieving development goals, Egypt has played a leading role in numerous development activities at the

regional level, and we have made achieving the goals of the Programme of Action a high national priority. That resolve stems from our belief that achieving those goals supports the greater framework of our national and regional development strategies in the Arab and African contexts. At the same time, it will strengthen our regional capacities to implement effectively the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences in the economic and social fields, in our regional efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. Those efforts are particularly important in our fellow African countries, many of whose chances to implement the MDGs by the 2015 target remain weak.

In this context, Egypt underscores the nexus between the implementation of the goals of the Cairo Programme of Action and the achievement of the MDGs. From that standpoint, Egypt looks forward to the 2010 summit proposed by the Secretary-General to review progress made in achieving the MDGs, as that summit will present a vital opportunity to intensify our international efforts aimed at achieving those goals and at formulating a common vision on how to push the international development agenda forward. Undoubtedly, it should inform our efforts to achieve the MDGs and the goals of the Cairo Programme of Action.

On the national front, the decision taken by Egypt in 2009 to create a new ministry specifically to deal with family and population issues in all their dimensions, reiterates our firm political commitment to address these issues. In addition, numerous policies and laws have been adopted by the Egyptian parliament in the past few years, aimed at deepening our commitment to women's empowerment, achieving gender equality, improving the human rights situation and reducing maternal and child mortality rates. Egypt has also decided to host the regional office of the United Nations Population Fund in Cairo, which we hope will become operational soon so as to complement the work of the Fund's country office in support of our efforts to implement the goals of the Cairo Programme of Action.

As we celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, I would like to express Egypt's continued concern over the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation, and to underline the negative repercussions of this situation for the achievement of internationally

agreed development goals, particularly those of the Cairo Programme of Action. The continuation of this situation undermines the efforts of the Palestinian people to achieve their economic and social development goals and to establish their independent State on all the territory occupied by Israel in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In addition, the effects of Israel's blockade and closure policies have denied the Palestinian people access to their basic needs. Moreover, Israel continues the blockade of the Gaza Strip, in defiance of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), and refuses to enter into any real peace process aimed at fulfilling the interests of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples in living in peace and security.

In conclusion, we hope that today's meeting will launch a serious discussion moving us towards a common understanding of how best to implement our goals by 2014, how, in the following phase of collective work to preserve what will have been achieved and how to continually build on those accomplishments.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Johannes Kyrle, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria.

Mr. Kyrle (Austria): At the outset, I wish to align myself with the declaration made by the Swedish presidency on behalf of the European Union. Austria — in its national capacity — would like to add some specific comments and reflections on issues that are particularly relevant to us. This year's anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) reminds us of the five years remaining to implement the commitments made in Cairo in 1994, where 179 countries for the first time acknowledged the interdependence between population issues and development. Also, for the first time, there was consensus on a global scale that empowering women and meeting people's needs with regard to education and health, particularly reproductive health, are necessary, both for individual advancement and for sustainable and balanced development.

The Programme of Action adopted at the Cairo Conference in 1994 — often referred to as the Cairo Agenda — established the paramount importance of advancing gender equality, equity, empowerment of women, ending violence against women and ensuring women's ability to control their own fertility for

population and development policies. It centres on providing universal education, reducing infant, child and maternal mortality, and ensuring universal access by 2015 to reproductive health care, including family planning, assisted childbirth and prevention of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. While it has provided much of the groundwork for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), its broad and comprehensive vision on development and its requirements includes many elements not covered in the eight MDGs. In particular, it addresses the complex relationship between population, economic growth and sustainable development, as well as population distribution, migration, climate change and urbanization.

Today's commemorative session provides an excellent opportunity to highlight the international consensus on the decisive importance for the development process of population dynamics, sexual and reproductive health rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, and to take stock of progress made and challenges remaining. In this context, Austria warmly welcomes the General Assembly's recent decision at its sixty-third session to establish a composite gender entity headed by an Under-Secretary-General. This will, we believe, significantly enhance the capacity, accountability and effectiveness of the United Nations in the area of gender.

In 2005, universal access to reproductive health care became one of the targets under MDG 5, improving maternal health. Numerous countries have considered the recommendations of the Cairo Conference and have adopted national policies, laws and programmes to further women's health and in particular to guarantee access to reproductive health care. Today, more women in poor countries choose to use family planning, more women enjoy the assistance of skilled attendants at birth, more infants survive and more girls are going to school, undeniably a gratifying testimonial of progress.

Yet the progress achieved so far is not sufficient, and the Cairo Agenda remains as relevant as ever: a billion people still live in absolute poverty, and every year, more than half a million women die from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, while 3 million infants die within the first week of life, mostly of causes related to their mother's health and to complications during pregnancy and delivery. In this context, the contribution of the United Nations

Population Fund (UNFPA) to the achievement of MDG 5 on improving maternal health is of paramount importance. Universal access to reproductive health and safe motherhood must become fundamental rights worldwide.

Every man, woman and child must have the same opportunity to lead a healthy life without discrimination. More needs to be done to fully implement this principle in our common response in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Many of those most in need of prevention, treatment and care services still face discrimination, marginalization and even criminalization. We are especially worried by the increasing feminization of HIV/AIDS, with more women and girls becoming infected. In order to reverse this alarming trend we need to step up our efforts to guarantee women's and girls' access to information and services for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Austria will continue to support international efforts to fight HIV and AIDS and is very proud to be hosting the XVIII International AIDS Conference in Vienna in July 2010, organized in cooperation with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and other partners. The Conference brings together all relevant stakeholders, representatives of Governments, United Nations agencies, civil society and academia, to evaluate progress and further discuss future priorities. A total of 25,000 participants and 6,000 journalists are expected in Vienna on this occasion. Austria very much hopes that the Conference will contribute to progress towards our common goal and in our global fight against HIV and AIDS.

Austria is deeply concerned about the high level of gender-based violence worldwide, in particular sexual violence against women and children in armed conflict. Every day, worldwide, hundreds of women, girls and children are systematically violated and sexually abused in conflict settings. The flagrant use of sexual violence as a deliberate means of warfare constitutes a major threat to international peace and security that must end immediately. States and other parties to conflict must observe their international legal obligations, while the international community must stand ready to prevent violence, protect individuals, end impunity and redress victims.

Lasting peace, reconciliation and sustainable development are impossible without the active contribution of women to peacebuilding and conflict

prevention. Women can make an important contribution to all peace processes, particularly to negotiations and mediation, as well as to post-conflict governance and reconstruction. In this regard, Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) have underlined the need to include women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping measures. Austria actively and firmly supported and co-sponsored Security Council resolution 1888 (2009) on women and children in armed conflict, which was unanimously adopted by the Council on 30 September 2009. Apart from fighting sexual violence effectively, we want to give victims of sexual violence in conflict situations a voice, improved protection and better medical and psychological care. Moreover, we will actively contribute to making next year's commemoration of the tenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) a success and to generating renewed and revitalized momentum towards its full implementation.

Austria commends UNFPA for the important role it plays in working to end all forms of violence against women, including harmful practices. Austria therefore supports the Fund's work by contributing financially, inter alia, to the Task Force on Violence against Women and the United Nations campaign to eliminate female genital mutilation by 2015.

Donor and partner countries alike have been severely hit by the recent economic and financial crisis, putting adequate funding for the implementation of the Programme of Action at risk. Let us use this opportunity to renew our commitment to the Cairo Agenda, assess progress, identify remaining challenges and give fresh impetus for the next five years to successfully implement the Programme of Action by its target date.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.