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General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3 (b): Special theme of the fiftieth session² of the Commission based on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation

Statement submitted by Stichting Rutgers WPF, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Humanist Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries, International Planned Parenthood Federation (Africa Region), and Stichting dance4life, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council³

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ [E/CN.9/2017/1](#).

² Changing population age structures and sustainable development.

³ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Stichting Rutgers WPF, the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, stichting dance4life, and International Planned Parenthood Federation (Africa region) — all organizations with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council — as well as Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network and CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality welcome the theme of the 50th session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development "Changing population age structures and sustainable development".

As organizations advocating for the rights of young people and adolescents, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, we particularly call for the attention and provide recommendations in relation to countries/regions that show young population age structures, and are characterized by high fertility and fast population growth. Demographic changes in such countries have led to the largest cohort of young people (aged 10-24 years), including adolescents (aged 10-19 years) in the world's history. According to the ICPD Global Review report 'Framework of Actions for the follow-up to the Programme of Action' (2014), 28 per cent of the global population in 2010 was young, even reaching more than 31 per cent in Africa. Countries and regions — in particular in Africa and some countries in Asia — with high fertility rates are foreseen to even quadruple their population towards the end of the century, which forms a massive challenge to the achievement of sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of its follow up and review conferences, which includes universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Future population age structures will however be determined by today's actions, investments, laws and policies — in particular when these actions respect, protect and fulfil young people's and adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights; and ensure their access to comprehensive sexuality education, youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including safe and legal abortion, and commodities such as a wide range of modern contraceptives for all, without any stigma, violence or discrimination. Investments, policies and laws must be rights-based, gender- and youth-responsive and non-discriminatory. Only if such actions are taken now, these regions/countries will be able to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend, and will find the right path towards sustainability.

Unfortunately too little is happening and much remains to be done to reach this path. Today, we still see that 225 million people would like to use contraceptives but do not have access to them; daily 800 women and girls die due to pregnancy or childbirth; and 20 million (young) women each year resort to unsafe abortions. Globally, 1 in 5 girls give birth before they turn 18. 34 million people live with HIV — with youth accounting for 40 per cent of all new HIV infections. Young people and adolescents in countries with high fertility rates are most heavily affected by these problems.

Too little is invested and too many social, economic, legal, cultural and religious barriers remain preventing universal access to contraceptives; to sexual and reproductive health information and education including comprehensive

sexuality education; and to a full spectrum of sexual and reproductive health services, including safe and legal abortion and youth-friendly services. Too little is done to fight the root causes of gender-based and sexual violence, and harmful practices such as female genital cutting and child, early and forced marriages. Sadly, discrimination based on age, gender, marital status, income, location, sexual orientation and gender identity, and/or expression, sex characteristics, migratory status, HIV status, disability or any other characteristic remains all too common.

In order to fulfil young peoples' and adolescents' human rights, governments need to meaningfully engage young people and adolescents in legal, policy and budgetary processes. Meaningful youth participation is also essential to be effective in reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend. For instance, it allows for young people to shape sexual and reproductive health services to better answer to their demands; and sexuality education curricula to better answer to the questions and realities lived by young people in particular contexts. Proactive strategies are therefore needed, such as earmarked funding for youth participation, including through youth-led and youth-focused organizations, in decision-making, policy formulation and implementation. In addition, it is of key importance to track the impact of budgets, laws and policies on young people's lives through youth responsive budgeting and consistent data collection among young people and adolescents.

Governments must be more accountable for their actions or lack thereof. In order to measure and track the effects of actions, investments, laws and policies on changes in population age structures, it is crucial that all SDG global indicators as well as regional and country-specific indicators are consistently integrated across all countries. In particular, indicators need to measure access to and quality of sexual and reproductive health services, information and education, including comprehensive sexuality education; the ability of young people and adolescents — in particular girls and young women — to make their own choices; and the required legal, financial and policy changes towards fulfilling young people's and adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights. All indicators need to be disaggregated at least on the basis of age, gender, income and location (rural/urban) to be able to identify and counter inequality and discrimination at their core. Only through a comprehensive indicator framework measured by all countries, a meaningful monitoring and review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of its follow up and review conferences and the 2030 Agenda can be realized.

Governments' commitments to sustainable development and the realities of young people and adolescents in countries with young population age structures call for concrete action today. For countries/regions to fulfil the human rights of young people and adolescents, and benefit from the demographic dividend, we recommend the following:

- Accelerate funding for and implementation of universal access to accessible, acceptable, affordable and quality sexual and reproductive health services and supplies across the life-course, including youth-friendly health services. This includes the removal of barriers, such as on the basis of age and marital status and parental consent to access modern contraceptives; and the removal of legal barriers for access to safe abortion services;

- Invest in universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and education, ensuring the integration of comprehensive sexuality education in national education curricula, with particular attention to peer-to-peer sexuality education;
- Eliminate all forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, including lesbian, bisexual, trans- and intersex women and girls, as well as harmful practices such as female genital cutting and child, early and forced marriages. Governments must invest more in prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, including through comprehensive sexuality education, and ensure access to health, social and legal services for all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence;
- Respect, protect and fulfil the right to peaceful assembly for civil society including women's groups, human rights defenders, youth-led and youth-focused organizations, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) organizations and minority groups; and earmark funding for meaningful youth participation in national decision-making, including by investing in youth-led and youth-focused organizations;
- Consistently measure all global SDG indicators, disaggregated at least on the basis of age, gender, income and location (rural/urban), in all countries and regions; and particularly monitor improvements in the area of young peoples' and adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- Fill in the critical data gap on adolescents, by collecting, analysing, and disseminating data specifically on girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 14 years, with due consideration to confidentiality principles, to inform effective policy development.
