

General Assembly Special Session

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Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014

Statement by Mr. Hans Brattskär
State Secretary/ Deputy Minister

Chair, distinguished delegates,

The Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo was ground-breaking. It highlighted the importance of demographic skills for monitoring human development and planning measures, as well as for assessing the effects of political and policy decisions, and implementing corrective actions related to population and development challenges. It also covered issues of key importance for people's private lives as well as for society with a particular focus on eliminating discrimination of women and girls.

Norway will recommit to the promises made in Cairo, and we hope that enhanced efforts are being made to fully implement the ICPD. Also, it is time to go beyond the Cairo Programme of Action. Every person has the right to be free from discrimination and to fully enjoy all human rights, without distinction of any kind including sexual orientation and gender identity.

(Check against delivery)

We can now build further on the knowledge about sexual and reproductive health that has been developed in recent years, and documented in the Global Review Report, the index report and Secretary-General's report.

This shows, for instance, that there are greater differences between rich and poor when it comes to access to safe delivery than for most other health issues. Why do we let the poor women of the world continue to risk their life and health when bringing new life into the world? And why have we been unable to stop the extreme social injustice of unsafe abortions? Safe abortion is available everywhere to those who can pay. The health hazards and even punishments suffered for illegal, unsafe abortions are the plight of the poor, the young and the marginalised. Adolescents in many places are denied access to contraception and comprehensive sexuality education, and they pay a high price for this.

Realising the right to health depends not only on equitable access to health services, but also on a host of underlying factors. Girls' education and good nutrition are among these. Empowerment is key. True gender equality is the goal – in intimate relationships, in families, in communities, in the education system and in political representation. Girls and women must be assured freedom from all sorts of violence. Culture and religion have an important role to play in supporting central values of human dignity, compassion and care, and in protecting the rights of all human beings, especially those in a vulnerable position.

Unfortunately, references to culture and religion may also be used to suppress people, and to deny them access to the protection and services they need. It is important to acknowledge that cultures evolve and change over time. They are not as static as we sometimes think. This can be clearly seen in connection with harmful traditional practices.

We welcome and are actively engaged in the global movement to combat child, early and forced marriage, and we promote zero tolerance for violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation.

Millennium Development Goal number 5 includes reducing maternal mortality and improving access to reproductive health. To achieve these goals, we need a strong commitment in the post-2015 development framework to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Thank you.