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UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

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SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
ON THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT

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Mr. President,

It is a pleasure to be here this evening to mark the twentieth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development; a conference which produced an agreement which has been, and we know must remain, a major landmark in recognising the right of individuals to have control over their lives and which placed people at the centre of sustainable development. The UK is proud to have been a staunch supporter of the ICPD's goals and principles over the past twenty years. That is, recognising the fundamental importance of human rights, gender equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights as foundations for sustainable development.

This ICPD anniversary year and review process has allowed us to reflect upon the important achievements made since 1994 in this regard; Achievements which have enabled many millions of women and men to be empowered to make decisions about their lives, including their sexual and reproductive health, without discrimination, coercion or violence.

This process has also, however, highlighted how far we still have to come before we fully achieve the vision of the ICPD Programme of Action. Many millions of women and girls are still unable to decide whether or not they have children and how many they have, and are denied the experience of safe and healthy pregnancy and childbirth. Undermining women's and girls' ability to

make these decisions diminishes not only an individual's full potential, but also that of families, communities and societies as a whole.

Two critical barriers to women's and girls' empowerment, recognised as such in the ICPD programme of action, are FGM and child, early and forced marriage. In July this year, the UK was extremely proud to co-host the Girl Summit 2014 with UNICEF, to support and amplify efforts across the world to tackle FGM and child, early and forced marriage.

The momentum from grass roots to governments has been tremendous – there have now been over 470 signatories to the Girl Summit Charter – including 37 governments - and over 150 commitments to action. I am proud of the UK's work both to address these issues in our own country and to support the efforts led by communities, leaders and governments in the global South to end these harmful practices. When we work together, much can be achieved.

Looking forward, and in our discussions on the post-2015 agenda, we must similarly consider how we, as an international community can continue to work together to achieve actions we committed to in 1994, and to which we have recommitted in subsequent years. The ICPD Beyond 2014 review and the Index report we are presented with today will be essential contributions to inform and guide our discussions on our priorities beyond 2015. We would like to thank UNFPA, UN Population Division and the Secretary General's office for their extensive work in completing these reports and indeed throughout the ICPD review.

We know, and evidence from this review also underlines, that we cannot achieve sustainable development if discrimination and marginalisation prevails and opportunities are denied to members of our society on the basis of their gender, sexual orientation, race, age, disability or any other basis. Non-discrimination and the right of individuals to lead a life free from violence should not be a distant aspiration, but a reality.

With this in mind, the UK fully supports an approach for post-2015 which recognises that universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential not only for gender equality, but also for sustainable development and poverty reduction.

This year has shown us how far we have come since 1994. We look forward to using this valuable outcome from our collective UN, Member State and civil society colleagues' efforts throughout this review year to inform how much further we can go to fully realise the principles of the ICPD.

I thank you.