

EUROPEAN POPULATION FORUM 2004

12-14 JANUARY 2004 - GENEVA

CLOSING CEREMONY

Time : Wednesday 14 January 2004 16.30 – 17.30

DR STEVEN SINDING

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been a great pleasure to have been a participant in this Forum – the first such event in what will be a very busy year in which we celebrate the 10th Anniversary of what we may begin to call the International *Consensus* on Population and Development. We must use this year to revitalize and reinvigorate the sexual and reproductive health and rights movement and reinstate this subject to its rightful place on the international agenda. We must also bring the full resources of the reproductive and sexual health community to bear in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

This Forum has provided us with the opportunity to examine some of the central issues in Europe – the progress that has been made as well as the challenges to truly realizing the ICPD goals. It is striking to a veteran of 30 years of international population conferences to see the parallels between the concerns with high fertility in the developing world in the last three decades of the 20th Century and now the growing concerns about low fertility in Europe as we enter the 21st. In both cases, there are fascinating and difficult issues of individual interests and rights versus societal interests and needs to be debated and resolved. This Forum has addressed these difficult policy choices with maturity and sophistication.

Every international population conference since Bucharest has emphasized the responsibility of governments to empower couples to have the information and the means to determine freely and responsibly the number, timing and spacing of their children. This was largely meant to apply to situations of fertility that was deemed to be too high. Does it apply as well to situations of too low fertility? Do governments have the responsibility to provide individuals with the information and means to have the number of children they want?

I would also like to comment on the highly constructive role played by the youth representatives at this Forum. Despite their small numbers and late inclusion, they have played a highly constructive role in the proceedings and I hope that all future meetings of this sort will make a special effort to include the youth perspective and strong youth participation.

While concentrating on issues affecting Europe, we must also remind ourselves that not only does the European community need to care for its own citizens; it also has a global responsibility for citizens worldwide, especially the poorest and the most marginalized. While much progress has been made, there remains much more to do both at home and abroad. Reproductive freedom remains an elusive goal for many people in all regions, even Europe.

European governments, donors, parliamentarians and NGOs have a global responsibility to which many have risen. I'd like to take this moment to give our thanks to the European Commission for the financial and moral support that means so much to our members around the world. Of course, we are equally grateful to the national European governments on whose support the work of international organizations such as IPPF, depends. In a political and economic climate that places SRH and rights under ever increasing pressure, we have depended on your financial support as well as your political leadership.

Now is not the time to retreat in the face of systematic attacks by those opposed to reproductive freedom – whether one refers to the current United States administration or the opposition forces within the European Community. We are on the eve of many important changes within the region. The enlarged European Union will pose new challenges and we as a community must be vigilant as defenders of reproductive choices and rights.

Meanwhile, as poverty reduction dominates the development agenda, we have a duty to make manifest the powerful links between the ICPD goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We need to articulate the ICPD goals in the context of the MDGs, emphasising that poverty is not just a matter of money, it is deprivation in other key areas of life, including access to high quality health services and education. But above all, the over-arching goal of poverty reduction cannot be met if the ICPD agenda is not achieved. The vast majority of

families, women in particular, simply cannot escape poverty unless they are able to gain control over their reproductive lives.

I believe as the first meeting on population and reproductive health in 2004, the European Forum has set an excellent tone for the many meetings and events that will follow throughout this anniversary year. On behalf of IPPF and speaking, I hope, for much of the NGO community, I would like to thank and congratulate the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Europe and UNFPA for organizing a meeting which has been rich in substance, vigorous in discussion, and progressive in its conclusions. IPPF looks forward to working in continued partnership with our many partners to make this half-way point in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action a key moment to regroup and strategize, and thus to bring us tangibly closer to delivering the promise and vision of ICPD to the millions of people whose rights and needs are not yet fully recognized and met.

Thank you very much.