

Speaking notes for Mr Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNECE

1 July 2013, 9:30 am, at Palais des Nations, room XVIII

UNECE regional conference “Enabling Choices: Population Priorities in the 21st Century”

Ambassador, your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues

I welcome you all,

- delegates of the Member States,
- experts of the scientific community and representatives of civil society,
- as well as colleagues from international organizations

to this UNECE regional conference under the symbolic title “Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century”.

It has been almost 20 years since the International Conference on Population and Development – the ICPD - was held in Cairo, Egypt, in 1994. It was a turning point in the international policy approach to population, firmly placing the needs and rights of the individual at the heart of development policies and programmes and envisioning a world where all people enjoy equal opportunities and freedoms to make choices and pursue their own life aspirations.

Countries participating in the Cairo conference, including 50 UNECE Member States at that time, adopted the **Programme of Action** which established a firm link between population, development and human rights, health and gender equality, thereby:

- responding to population dynamics within a human rights framework;
- advancing gender equality and empowerment of women;
- promoting sexual and reproductive health, including maternal health;
- increasing access to education, especially for girls;
- addressing issues of urbanization, migration and environment;
- ensuring that everyone experiences the benefit of sustainable economic development; and
- promoting participation of civil society.

The ICPD **Programme of Action** was agreed for a 20 year time frame, and we have gathered here today **to take stock** of the achievements and remaining challenges, and **to discuss priorities and policy recommendations** that need to be taken in the light of **changing societal concerns** and emerging issues in population dynamics across countries of our broad and very diverse region.

While assessing the progress, we should not forget that the implementation of the **1994 ICPD Programme of Action** started during a critical period in the history **of the eastern part** of the UNECE region, where a profound transition towards more democratic and economically dynamic societies was taking place. In a rather short period of time, these countries experienced significant social changes in value systems and norms, including important changes in their policies and legislation. The western UNECE countries underwent societal changes as well, though perhaps more gradual.

These societal changes had a great effect on population dynamics in the UNECE region and posed new challenges. Fertility declined (in the east) and remained low (in the west), life expectancy increased and population ageing intensified; new forms of families emerged and proliferated; international migration flows increased; and populations became more mixed.

The way we approach population and development has further evolved as well. **We assert today that population dimension is a key element of sustainable development which rests on social, economic and environmental pillars and also considers the impact of development on the opportunities of future generations. It is therefore indispensable to reconcile the needs of all groups within society, young and old, men and women and people with special needs.**

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe has been working closely together with the United Nations Population Fund to **evaluate the progress** in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action in the UNECE region.

You, the member States and civil society organizations, have participated in the 'ICPD beyond 2014' Global Survey, taking stock of progress made in the different areas related to the ICPD Programme of Action and identifying the persistent and emerging issues. I would like to **thank you** personally for the time and work that has been invested within your organizations in completing the very comprehensive questionnaire of this Survey.

The information gathered through the Survey provided the basis for the **UNECE regional report** “ICPD Beyond 2014: The UNECE Region’s Perspective”. This report is meant to be an important tool for policy makers and civil society to keep track of the persistent issues and the future priorities with respect to population and development. We all look forward to hearing more about the results from the survey that will be presented later during this plenary session.

A number of **other activities** were undertaken by UNFPA together with UNECE as part of the ‘ICPD beyond 2014’ review process in the UNECE region. They aimed to involve more stakeholders in the process and to broaden the discourse on the ICPD issues. For instance:

- **three expert meetings** on the same topics as the thematic sessions of this Conference **were convened in March-April this year**. More than 75 experts from different countries and representing various stakeholder groups took part in them. You will hear about the outcomes of these meetings during the respective sessions today and tomorrow.
- also, as part of the ‘ICPD beyond 2014’ review, **a scientific report** was commissioned from the Wittgenstein Center for Demography and Global Human Capital in Vienna; the copies of this publication are available today. In it you will find an analysis of the UNECE population trends and prospects, with insights on policy implementation and good practices in the region.

Many of the population and development principles set in the ICPD Programme of Action 20 years ago were incorporated into the United Nations **Millennium Development Goals**. Today, the United Nations agencies are working with governments, civil society and other partners in preparing the post-2015 development agenda. Therefore, with the outcomes of the global ‘ICPD beyond 2014’ review in mind, the discussions of the next two days are your opportunity to contribute to shaping the post-2015 development agenda.

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I would like to thank the government of Switzerland for co-hosting the conference and for its interest *in* and generous support *to* the ‘ICPD beyond 2014’ review process.

Let me wish you two very successful days and productive discussions at this conference.