



**STATEMENT OF CAROL BELLAMY
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 TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S SPECIAL SESSION ON ICPD + 5**

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates. Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the United Nations Children's Fund, I am very pleased to join you for this Special Session of the General Assembly on ICPD+5.

Mr. Chairman, the International Conference on Population and Development was a watershed event in the struggle for universal access to health and well-being. In approving the 1994 Programme of Action in Cairo, the international community ringingly affirmed that no population strategy can succeed unless its primary focus is on promoting people-centred development.

Five years later, it is clear that the heart of the ICPD remains its recognition of the mutually reinforcing nature of population policy with gender equality and the empowerment of women – along with the eradication of poverty; economic progress; and protection of the environment.

In building on the agreements reached at the World Summit for Children and the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the ICPD Programme of Action also recognised that there is vital link between the health and well-being of children and women – and the promotion and protection of their human rights.

Indeed, the ICPD's emphasis on people-centered development and the advancement of women had a profound influence on the outcomes, a year later, of the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Mr. Chairman, the Population Conference showed why it is vital that population and development goals be pursued in tandem with efforts to increase access to education, especially for girls – and to improve primary health-care delivery systems across the board.

The indispensability of these links can be seen in the dramatic gains for children and women in the nearly 10 years that have elapsed since the World Summit for Children – and the five years since the Cairo Conference.

They are achievements that also stand out in the context of two contemporary milestones: this coming November's 10th anniversary of the General Assembly's adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – and last month's 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Indeed, the world's increasing recognition of the surpassing importance of human rights is transforming the way all of us – governments, civil society and the United Nations System – are working to establish better standards of life in larger freedom for all people, beginning with the world's children.

It is an effort designed to make the universal enjoyment of human rights a reality through diverse partnerships and participation.

Mr. Chairman, the world long ago ran out of excuses to ignore the fundamental rights of the millions of people, half of them children, who are struggling to survive such egregious violations of their rights as poverty, illiteracy and ill health, exacerbated by violence, exploitation and abuse.

Among the most daunting human rights violations is the unfolding catastrophe of HIV/AIDS, which continues to cut a devastating swath through much of the developing world, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, where it has already begun to reverse decades of development gains, especially in child mortality and life expectancy.

Mr. Chairman, we must break the conspiracy of silence surrounding HIV/AIDS and take full account of the immense peril that the virus poses to every aspect of human survival. And this effort must begin with governments summoning the political will to launch a massive campaign aimed at the most vulnerable: the poor, adolescents, women and children – especially girls, whose susceptibility to HIV/AIDS appears to be sharply higher than boys in some hard-hit regions.

New partnerships and effective communication have supported improved approaches for engaging young people and adolescents in the fight to discourage high-risk behaviour.

And in the fight against mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, we need to foster more close partnerships with community-based groups, families and care providers as well as those living with HIV/AIDS. These alliances are essential if we are to bring about the changes in behaviours and practices that are the only way to slow the wildfire-like spread of HIV/AIDS through the developing world.

As we seek to build on the progress towards the goals of ICPD and the related UN Summits and Conferences, we must step up our efforts in other areas as well.

Despite reductions in child and maternal mortality in the decade since the World Summit for Children, some 12 million children under the age of 5 – three-quarters of them infants – still die annually from readily preventable causes like measles and acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea.

Mr. Chairman, it is high time that all of us unite to end that tragedy.

And simultaneously, we must also attack the problems specifically rooted in gender inequality and the systematic discrimination faced by women and girls – problems like maternal mortality, which kills nearly 600,000 expectant mothers in pregnancy or childbirth – and the denial of basic quality education, which discriminates against 73 million girls who either attend no school or never complete their education.

A critical investment for ending these inequities is life-skills education, which builds the self-esteem of girls and their capacity to protect themselves against such common risks as violence, sexual abuse and exploitation – as well as the risks of early parenting, which often create circumstances that deprive girls of their right to education.

At the same time, education for boys must specifically address the unlearning of negative behaviour patterns while promoting positive new behaviours based on tolerance and equality.

Programmes of school-based education, peer education and special youth programmes are beginning to show results in improving adolescent health – including the prevention of high-risk behaviour and HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Chairman, we can all learn from the good practices of countries like Jamaica, Namibia, Uganda, Thailand and others, where positive results have been achieved by combining youth participation and commitment: more services aimed at youth; more parental involvement; and more education and information, using schools and other sites.

Mr. Chairman, if the world is to make good on its commitment to the goals of ICPD and the whole continuum of UN Summits and Conferences, resources are essential – and one powerful and efficient approach to generating them is through the 20/20 Initiative.

The Hanoi Consensus on the 20/20 Initiative calls for commitments from the developing countries and the donor community to expand basic social services. And it emphasizes the need for closer collaboration between governments in developing countries, civil society, the private sector, donor countries and multilateral organizations to promote adequate financing and proper utilization of allocations for social services.

Achieving international consensus on the goals of ICPD was the result of serious debate and negotiation, resulting in important agreement on a basic set of actions to benefit the world's population. Mr. Chairman, these actions are of key importance.

But UNICEF is deeply concerned that the pace of implementation has been slow and that the overall level commitment has weakened.

On the eve of the new millennium, I appeal to all actors – governments and civil society, from NGOs to the private sector – to do their part to ensure the legacy of the Population Conference, and the honouring of commitments made at the time and as part of the follow-up process.

Thank you.