

Ensuring the full human rights of all women and girls are respected: UK Statement at the UN General Assembly

Thank you Chair, Excellencies.

At the 55th Session of the Commission on Population and Development, I am pleased that we have come together to discuss the critical theme of 'Population and Sustainable Development, in particular, Sustained and Inclusive Economic Growth'.

On behalf of the United Kingdom, I wish to start by thanking you, Mr Chair, and the other members of the Bureau for your leadership. I particularly want to thank El Salvador and the Netherlands for their co-facilitation of this year's text. The UK has every faith that we will achieve a consensus outcome under their able leadership.

We all know that sustained and inclusive economic growth can only be realised when all women, adolescents and girls have their full human rights respected, protected and fulfilled, including comprehensive sexual and reproductive rights. The human rights of women, adolescents and girls in all their diversity include the right to have control over and to decide freely and responsibly on all matters related to their sexuality, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

We must do more to ensure that these rights are protected, particularly in humanitarian contexts and for those who are most marginalised and face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

There is still such a long way to go to achieve this. There are 121 million pregnancies annually that are unintended according to UNFPAs most recent report. Most of these unintended pregnancies end in abortion, and 45% of all these abortions are unsafe – many tragically leading to death.

And we are going in the wrong direction. The situation is compounded by the rise of anti-gender movements, the devastating impact of the pandemic and other legal, economic, and social barriers that women, adolescents, and girls are facing, including global conflict, which further limit access to contraception, safe abortion and health services.

Member States must act now to ensure women, adolescents and girls around the world can access quality and comprehensive sexual and reproductive services, including safe abortion, key to unlocking their agency and potential and contributing to sustainable economic growth. Member States should also prioritise strengthening health systems, committing to Universal Health coverage and exploring the use of innovative delivery models like telemedicine to improve access to and to achieve the full realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The right to inclusive, equitable and quality education is equally central to achieving more sustainable development.

We cannot say often enough that education improves women and girl's lifetime earnings, helps with poverty alleviation, and brings economic benefits to households.

Now too many girls are not returning to school after the Covid-lockdowns, which have led to increasing rates of teenage pregnancy. But we want to stress that education must include evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education so that adolescents and youth are empowered to make their own informed decisions about their health, well-being and lives.

As we look to ICPD 30 in 2024, the UK is committed to using our position to listen to and amplify the voices of women, adolescents, and girls and those most marginalised, empowering them as decision-makers, advocates, and leaders, which is especially pertinent to next year's important theme of education at the Commission on Population and Development. Thank you Chair, Excellencies for your time.