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Statement by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

For people-centered development, we cannot ignore how many people we have, where they live, in what conditions they live and how fully they are empowered and engaged in the development of the region.

Looking ahead, the region's population is expected to grow from 4 billion to nearly 5 billion by 2050, and most of this growth will take place in urban areas, mainly due to internal migration. Most of the benefits of economic growth so far have been enjoyed by the wealthy people, with enormous numbers of other people being excluded from the process and benefits of development. People at the bottom wealth quintile have not seen much progress.

Recent surveys show that household structures and living arrangements are also changing and becoming increasingly diverse. Single-person households and single parent households are rising, primarily headed by women. And the numbers of people never married, separated and divorced are also increasing, while the situation of child and forced marriage has not seen much progress. Asia and the Pacific accounts for half the global child marriage – marriage before 18.

Moreover, 1 in 3 women worldwide reports having experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. In fact, according to a recent multi-country study in Asia and the Pacific involving 10,000 men, 1 in 4 men admitted to perpetrating rape. And laws designed to protect the rights of women and girls, where they exist, are often not enforced.

These emerging trends and evidence have important implications for economic and social development and environmental sustainability. The recent report by the UN Secretary-General on the framework of action beyond 2014 to follow up on the International Conference on Population and Development states that sustainability should address the linkages between increasingly diverse population dynamics, the environment and inequality. While the current development model has improved living standards and expanded opportunity for many, the economic and social gains have been distributed unequally and have come at great cost to the environment.

The SG's report, which was based on the survey results from the governments, proposes the path to sustainability, through 1) extending human rights and protecting all persons from discrimination, violence and abuse; 2) investing in lifelong health and education, especially for the region's young people; including sexual and reproductive health and rights; 3) ensuring security of place and mobility; 4) ensuring inclusion and equitable participation of older persons in society; 5) building sustainable cities linked with rural areas; 6) changing patterns of consumption; and 7) promoting better leadership and greater innovation.

The Asia-Pacific region, as a whole, is still going through the demographic window of opportunity where the share of productive age population is relatively large to support children and older people. We can reap the benefits of demographic dividend if we invest in young people now, so they are well educated, well skilled and are engaged in gainful, decent work. If we fail, a large number of young people, unemployed and underemployed, will become a demographic and economic burden.

Productive age almost overlaps with the reproductive age. Healthy reproductive life for both men and women is a foundation of productive life. This is especially crucial for women and girls, for whom pregnancy is a life-changing event, including death. Healthy women and girls, free from discrimination and violence, who are able to plan their lives and families according to their aspirations and to the fullest of their capabilities, will promote inclusive, sustainable development.

To make sure our efforts reach people at the lowest wealth quintile, instead of national average, we should monitor indicators for this group, and at the same time, endeavor to increase data availability at the disaggregate level. Unless they are counted and their lives are improved, we cannot say we achieved inclusive development and the life of dignity for all.

ESCAP and UNFPA hosted the regional Asian and Pacific Population Conference in September 2013 where the Ministerial Declaration was adopted. This is a 10 year commitment and encompasses poverty eradication and employment, health, sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, gender equality and women's empowerment, adolescent and young people, ageing, migration, urbanization, sustainable development, and data and statistics. It also agreed on the modalities for implementation. Thus, I hope this regional forum will integrate the forward-looking outcome of the Asian and Pacific Population Conference into its deliberations and the final document. UNFPA is committed to make everyone counts.

Thank you.