

Statement by Nelson G. Agyemang, Esq.
President of Youth for Population Information and Communication
at the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for
the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)
New York
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Youth Forum '94 -- Accra Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development

It is an honour for me to present to this august assembly a summary of the outcomes of the just concluded Youth Forum '94 which was held in Accra, Ghana from 25 to 29 March.

The forum was organized by the Ghanaian Ministry of Youth and Sports and a Ghana-based NGO, Youth for Population Information and Communication, with UNFPA assistance. Sixty eight youth and youth workers from more than 30 countries, mainly from Africa, met to provide inputs into the ICPD process from a youth perspective.

The forum adopted the Accra Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development to the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the ICPD. The secretariat has kindly arranged to distribute the Declaration, and you can find the document, in all six United Nations official languages, in this conference room.

Mr. Chairman,

Young people aged 10 to 24 years constitute one third of the world's population. Eighty per cent of this group live in developing countries. In Africa, about 55 per cent of the population is below 25 years of age.

Our generation finds itself in deplorable conditions that provide few opportunities for us to play an active role in society. Among the problems affecting our lives are the changes in the traditional family structure, early marriage, unplanned and unwanted early parenthood, rural-urban migration, unemployment, increasing occurrence of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection and AIDS and substance abuse. To make things worse, we are often not given a chance to be involved, to participate in matters that have a direct bearing over our daily lives.

Against all these odds, we are far from being pessimistic. We strongly believe that our future is in our hands. We are greatly encouraged by the dynamic leadership that Dr. Nafis Sadik, Secretary-General of the ICPD and Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), has exercised. Indeed, our Accra Declaration cited part of her recent statement, which reads: "Youth is a time of hope, expectation and excitement about the future. It is also a period of constant change in one's life -- physically, emotionally and intellectually - - a crucial period that can determine the future."

It is in this spirit that we met in Accra. We have examined the draft ICPD programme of action and the Dakar/Ngor Declaration on Population, Family and Sustainable Development which was adopted by African governments in Senegal in December 1992. We are in general agreement with both documents, and fully support the positive tones and contents concerning youth.

In particular, we call upon the international community to promote to the fullest extent possible the well-being and potential of youth, particularly the under-privileged youth. There is an urgent need to recognize the special needs of youth, especially young women, for social support, economic opportunity and access to reproductive health care. We recommend laws, policies and measures, as well as education campaigns to do away with such practices which hinder the positive development of youth, like child marriage and female genital mutilation. We firmly believe that young men should also be responsible to themselves, to their partners and to their community. For example, we call for special programmes for young men that focus on the reproductive rights of young women, including the right to refuse sexual advances.

Recognizing the many positive references to adolescents and youth in the draft ICPD programme of action, the Accra Declaration contains four specific suggestions for changes. They are not intended to alter the substance of the document, but are meant to give emphasis to certain aspects of the draft. We are confident that the necessary changes will be made at this session of the Preparatory Committee, so that the relevant sections of the document that bear on youth are strengthened to adequately reflect the aspirations of youth. As you know, millions of young people could not be present here today to express their concerns.

Mr. Chairman,

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

This statement would not be complete without a reference to the fruitful experience my organization, a youth NGO, has with a government -- the Government of the Republic of Ghana, and an international organization -- UNFPA. The fact that the Accra forum came to a consensus is testimony of how the three parties can forge an alliance for the betterment of youth. Let us work together to create a better future for all of us, as well as future generations, in the spirit of the United Nations International Year of the Youth 1985 -- Participation, Development and Peace.

