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Is 20 Years Just Nothing? The International Conference on Population and Development 20 Years after its Adoption

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Ms. Alcalde will be an expert speaker at the Meeting of the Group of Women Parliamentarians to be held during the 11th Plenary Assembly of ParlAmericas.

At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the 179 countries gathered in Cairo approved a Programme of Action (PoA) to be implemented over the following 20 years. This document constituted a paradigm shift in the population-development relationship, as it moved from the traditional vision of demographic control to a vision based on rights, centring on the needs of individuals (both men and women) with a human rights focus. People and human rights were thus placed at the very core of development.

The PoA dealt with key aspects of the relationship between population and development. This is evidenced by the diverse subject areas addressed in its various chapters. The close relationship it establishes between sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, population, gender equality, violence against women, poverty, and sustainable development from a rights-based approach is what makes the 1994 ICPD a historic milestone.

Against this backdrop, consensus was achieved among the international community on population and development goals, which were translated into qualitative and quantitative targets to be reached by no later than 2014. Noteworthy among these goals are: sustained economic growth in a context of sustainable development; universal access to education, especially for girls; gender equity and equality between men and women; reduction of maternal and infant mortality; recognition of reproductive rights; universal access to a wide range of reproductive health services, including family planning; progress towards gender equality; and the elimination of violence against women, among others.

The PoA and its compliance have been subject to five-year reviews, namely ICPD+5 in 1999, ICPD+10 in 2004, and ICPD+15 in 2009. These processes have demonstrated the progress made, but have also made it clear that the agenda and commitments undertaken in 1994 are far from being realized. Twenty years later, the relevance of the issues addressed by the PoA endures, though the world – as well as the problems and needs of its people – have changed significantly. The ICPD review process, 20 years after it was passed, offered an important opportunity to assess today's context, reaffirm commitment towards full implementation of the PoA, and make new commitments to address both pending and emerging issues.

In December 2010, Resolution 65/234 of the UN General Assembly acknowledged that many governments would not be capable of meeting all the goals established by the PoA by 2014. Therefore, it decided to extend the 20-year period, in addition to establishing that

a global, comprehensive review should be conducted – what we now know as [ICPD Beyond 2014](#).

The process consisted of different reports and meetings, among which should be highlighted the regional conferences. Each of the regional economic and social committees held a regional conference in 2013 in order to discuss the progress made and challenges faced in implementing the PoA, as well as to set priorities for the regional population and development agenda.

This event was doubly important for Latin America and the Caribbean; first, because it was the [first session of the newly created Regional Conference on Population and Development](#), and second, because it was part of the ICPD Beyond 2014 process. The meeting was held in Montevideo, Uruguay, from August 12 to 15, 2013, and it was attended by 38 delegations from Member States and Associate Members, 24 regional and international agencies, and 260 nongovernmental organizations. Chaired by the Uruguayan government, Member States discussed and approved the Montevideo Consensus, which defines the regional agenda on population and development, as well as its principles, priority areas, and framework for implementation.

The [Montevideo Consensus](#) is divided into three sections, namely: General Principles, Priority Actions, and Follow-up Recommendations, with the second being the most extensive – it includes 108 commitments on the following priority topics:

- Full integration of population dynamics into sustainable development with equality and respect for human rights
- Rights, needs, responsibilities and demands of boys, girls, adolescents, and youth
- Ageing, social protection, and socioeconomic challenges
- Universal access to sexual and reproductive health services
- Gender equality
- International migration and the protection of all migrants' human rights
- Territorial inequality, spatial mobility and vulnerability
- Indigenous peoples: Interculturalism and rights
- Afro-descendants: Rights and combating racism and racial discrimination
- Frameworks for the implementation of the future regional agenda on population and development.

At the end of the conference, delegates approved this unprecedented regional agenda, and they committed to creating regional mechanisms to monitor its fulfilment and ensure accountability, a component that will be essential for thoroughly complying with the commitments set out in the Consensus.

Women and men parliamentarians have played a substantial role in the ICPD Beyond 2014 process to ensure that both the conclusions and commitments established are based on people's needs. They have also been instrumental in the follow-up of Member States' undertakings, by contributing to the surveillance of and accountability for the implementation of this process; as well as by impacting the actions and policies resulting from this process through national and regional parliamentary structures.