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Sixty-ninth Session of the  
United Nations General Assembly, New York  
SPEECH ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Words of Her Excellency

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Vice President for Foreign Relations during the Extraordinary High-Level Meeting on Population and Development

*69<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly  
New York – September 2014*

It is with great pleasure and genuine emotion that I address you at this Extraordinary High-Level Meeting on Population and Development.

The Republic of Panama extends its thanks to the United Nations and the United Nations Population Fund in particular for this invitation, which enables us to pause and reflect on the progress made with regard to the commitments undertaken at the International Conference on Population and Development.

The targets set out by the Programme of Action have defined a course, a path for national and global actions aimed at the eradication of poverty and the creation of more and better opportunities for the people of the world. Although 20 years have passed since the Cairo summit, there is no doubt the Programme of Action remains valid today.

In 2010 the General Assembly adopted an extension to the Programme of Action beyond 2014, and recommended the presentation of a global report containing data and analysis on the state of development of the world population.

The most recent Global Report reveals that in the past two decades millions of people have succeeded in leaving poverty behind and that access to health and education services has expanded considerably. The report also emphasizes, however, that deep inequalities remain, and that these affect women and girls in a disproportionate manner. Reducing these gaps in order to guarantee the full exercise of the economic and social rights of the population is the challenge that lies before us today.

Thus the post-2014 Programme of Action is not only necessary but urgent. This Extraordinary Meeting will serve to encourage the states, governments and peoples of the world to work together to resolve the emerging problems and raise awareness of global demographic issues.

This requires a solution to the existing inequalities between countries and societies, which demands real political will and international reciprocity, together with a dialogue that establishes human needs as the object and subject of development.

As Vice President of my country, but above all as a woman and mother, I call on the awareness and reflection of member states to apply renewed celerity and impetus to the pending development agenda, in order to resolve the existing gaps in relation to gender equality, education, sexual and reproductive health, and maternal and infant health.

The Government of the Republic of Panama upholds its population policies as a comprehensive process of equality and equity, with the participation of vulnerable groups: women, people with disabilities, indigenous people, afro-descendants, and the elderly.

We are aware that development is not only a question of figures, but of people. That behind national statistics which indicate high and sustained levels of growth, deep inequalities are concealed. Although in urban areas, average schooling reaches 9 years, in the indigenous districts this falls to 3 years. In urban areas almost all births take place in health facilities with skilled attendance, but the figure stands at barely 40% in other areas. We are aware that high levels of maternal and infant mortality remain in rural and indigenous areas due to lack of transportation, economic barriers and lack of timely access to health services.

Our administration is committed to changing this. Our goal is to translate the high level of economic growth the country has enjoyed in recent years into inclusive development focused on reducing the major gaps that hinder the full integration of the whole population into the development process.

For this reason the priorities of our Government Plan include the consolidation of a social protection system that, together with strong investment in human capital, enables individuals and citizens to break the cross-generational poverty cycle and achieve their potential. It takes a human-oriented approach to form policies that broaden access to education and culture, primary healthcare, drinking water and sanitation for all, the reduction of malnutrition and the development of sustainable sources of income.

Programmes like the Universal Scholarship and Opportunities Network promote school attendance across the nation, and foster the demand for basic health services. Initiatives like Mesoamerica Health 2015 invest in an aggressive and highly-focused manner in improving access to quality sexual and reproductive health services in order to reduce, in the short- and medium-term, unmet needs in family planning service and the maternal and infant mortality rates in indigenous areas. Our health services are principally oriented towards prevention, and in the case of adolescents to the development of friendly services that protect their rights.

We know that it is only through a comprehensive approach to population and development issues that the post-2015 Cairo Action Plan can be carried out effectively.

Panama reiterates its commitment to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development post-2014, and to the Montevideo Consensus.

As a Member State of the United Nations, Panama joins the efforts undertaken by the international community to define policies, strategies and programs aimed at protecting and promoting the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that foster the prosperity and development of our nations.

Thank you very much.