



## **SERBIA**

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SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE  
PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT BEYOND 2014

*Check against delivery*

## **STATEMENT**

by

H.E. MR. IVICA DAČIĆ  
FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

New York, 22 September 2014

Mr. Chairman,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Mr. Executive Director,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished NGO Representatives,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my special honour and satisfaction to greet this important meeting on behalf of the Republic of Serbia. The improvement of the living conditions and well-being of all people that the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development has dealt with for 20 years is just as compelling and relevant today as it was at the time when the Programme was adopted.

The Cairo Principles set down the direction for United Nations Member States to go in their activity. The fact that the exercise of human rights and dignity, age and gender equality, empowerment of women, protection of reproductive health and rights and the right to education for all make part of the United Nations agenda beyond 2015 is indicative of the significance of these issues.

We re-affirm by this meeting the validity of the universally recognized rights on behalf of the peoples and countries that we represent. The world has changed during these 20 years. The values that we believe in have remained the same, but not the problems that we are faced with. Achieving the goals of the Programme of Action is only a precondition for a life worthy of man irrespective of his national or religious belonging, gender, age or material status.

In its fervid struggle to better the living conditions of the population, the Government of the Republic of Serbia is being given unstinting support by the UNFPA Office in Serbia opened in 2006. We are on the common task of reducing the existing problems of negative birth rate, demographic trend of population aging, extensive emigration and the unemployment of the younger population and, by the same token, the consequences that the negative indicators have had for the economic growth.

The Republic of Serbia has been fully committed to economic recovery and internal reforms, while making every effort to contribute to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals globally and taking active part in formulating the sustainable development goals after 2015. EU membership continues to be my country's first foreign-policy priority and we view the accession process as a chance to improve the living conditions of our citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The population picture of Serbia today is not different from that of Europe. The aging of the population is the most noticeable population phenomenon and Serbia's average age is the highest in South-East Europe. The difficult economic situation of the country accounted for the decline of the birth rate. In the last 50 years, the percentage of the younger generation decreased almost by a half and 20 per cent of the population are people aged 65 and over. Of particular concern is the

fact that the worker-to-retiree ratio in Serbia today is one to one. 30 years ago the ratio was four to one.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, Serbia is making every effort to improve the position of the old people. The Council on Ageing and the Old Age Affairs was established in 2007 as an expert advisory body, dealing with the implementation of the national policy related to the older generation and the adaptation of international policies and strategies. To focus public attention on problems and discrimination facing the elderly and highlight the importance of providing them a proper living environment, we observe the International Day of Older Persons, designated by UNGA resolution 45/106, on 1 October every year.

High on our agenda is the empowerment of women. The number of women in management positions has increased, while their percentage in the least educated part of the population has decreased. The mortality of pregnant and parturient women in Serbia in the last 10 years has declined to the level average of the European region, while the number of abortions of unwanted pregnancies has been almost halved. By providing conditions for safe motherhood through education and information of women, we are contributing to the promotion and protection of reproductive health.

For Serbia, the question of population migration is of key importance. Close to 30 000 people, most of them of higher or high education and about 10 years younger than the country's age average, leave Serbia every year. Accordingly, we are faced with a continual 'brain drain'. It is difficult to reconcile ourselves to these numbers, all the more so as we recall that, according to the statistical data, right after the United States, Serbia had the largest influx of immigrants at the turn of XIX and XX centuries. Its prestige was so great that many prominent scientists, doctors, politicians craved Serbian citizenship.

Mr. Executive Director,

Regardless of the progress we have made in promoting and improving the overall living conditions of the population of Serbia so far, we continue to face many challenges. To solve part of the problems of the population, we need to devise National Strategies for population development and the protection of reproductive health. We expect you to help us in this regard. We consider that it would significantly contribute to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals in Serbia which remains strongly committed to the goals of sustainable development and demonstrates it by its activities within ECOSOC.

Excellencies,

Every individual has the right to be treated as we would wish others to treat our children. In conclusion, let me quote US President John Kennedy who said in his Report to the American People in 1963 that "the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened."

Thank you for your attention.