

PRESS RELEASE

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Asian and Pacific Countries Adopt Ground-Breaking Agenda on Population, Development and Rights

BANGKOK, Thailand (ESCAP and UNFPA) – A regional ministerial conference of Asian and Pacific governments has issued a strong reaffirmation that gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights are indispensable to sustainable development, and must be a key part of the post-2015 development framework.

Ministers and senior officials from 47 countries were among nearly 500 country delegates and civil society representatives attending the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference (APPC) in Bangkok from 16-20 September. They reviewed progress and gaps, and identified priority actions in addressing a broad set of population-related challenges, with a view to advancing people's rights and well-being through inclusive and equitable development.

After days of intense discussions, they adopted a comprehensive Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development. The document will be the region's input to next year's UN General Assembly review of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which in turn will inform global consultations on development priorities succeeding the Millennium Development Goals.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) organized the Conference in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

At the closing, Noeleen Heyzer, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, commended governments for their forward-looking agreement: "The Declaration is a new milestone and a blueprint for continued Asia-Pacific leadership, on issues of population in the next phase of development, with sustainability at its core, benefitting both our people and our planet."

"Addressing one of the most important parts of our unfinished business, it affirms the importance of non-discrimination, of ending violence against women and girls, and of universal sexual and reproductive health, services, and rights. It affirms the importance of national laws and policies which respect and protect the reproductive rights of every person, and enable all people to exercise them without discrimination on any grounds."

The Declaration reasserts key principles of the ICPD Programme of Action, stressing States' responsibility to protect human rights for all without distinction and to address the root causes of poverty. It calls for universal and equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services, to further reduce maternal deaths, ensure access to family planning and prevent the spread of HIV.

There is a strong emphasis on promoting gender equality, including calls to end violence against women and girls and early and forced marriage.

Reflecting the findings of a survey on countries' implementation of the Programme of Action, the agreement also highlights actions essential to further progress. A central focus is on the rights of young people and their needs, including comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraception including for the unmarried, education and employment opportunities.

The Asia-Pacific's changing demographics are addressed with recommendations on countries' need for rights-based policies that effectively respond to population ageing, urbanization and migration. In the region with the most rapid pace of population ageing worldwide, the Declaration calls for strengthening health and social protection systems that address the vulnerability to poverty and social isolation of older persons.

Governments adopted the Declaration by an overwhelming 38-3 vote with one abstention. Some governments recorded reservations on references in the agreement to "sexual rights" and "sexual orientation and gender identity."

Remarking on the Conference, UNFPA Deputy Executive Director Kate Gilmore said, "This meeting has once again affirmed the ICPD consensus as a document for our time, pointing the way to the future we want: one in which human rights are upheld for all of us, with the exception of none of us."