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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the special session of the General Assembly entitled
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic
objectives and action in critical areas of concern and
further actions and initiatives**

Statement submitted by Federation for Women and Family Planning, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, adopted a 20-year Programme of Action that addressed the issues of population and development and dwelled upon the complex interrelationships between population, sustained economic growth, sustainable development, advances in education, economic status and the empowerment of women. The Programme of Action emphasized universal access to health care, including reproductive health, safe motherhood, the treatment and prevention of sexually transmitted infections and protection from violence.

The year 2014 will mark the target year for achieving the commitments set in 1994, providing an opportunity to comprehensively assess the principles, aims and future of the Programme of Action. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development process, the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014 and the development agenda beyond 2015 are review processes aimed at assessing the progress made in the implementation of action plans, goals and targets established at the United Nations conferences and summits held during the 1990s.

Evidence-based analysis of the situation in Central and Eastern Europe has shown that the region lags behind the developed part of the world. Central and Eastern European countries have made very modest headway in applying the International Conference on Population and Development framework as a tool for establishing a sustainable architecture that protects and promotes women's rights in the region. While some progress can be noted in the sphere of reproductive health and sexual rights (such as a small decrease in maternal mortality, a small increase in the use of contraceptives and the decriminalization of homosexuality in most countries of the region), the accomplishment of the main goals of the International Conference on Population and Development is far from in sight. Achievements have been unequal and insufficient, and in some cases significant setbacks have taken place.

In the 1990s, the region was marked by a series of social and economic upheavals that had an overall negative impact on its development. This particular dynamic contributed to growing inequality, expressed, most significantly, in gendered terms. More recently, the region witnessed a revival of populist politics, of patriarchal discourses and fundamentalist religious pressures. These factors have hampered policies addressing population management and reproductive rights.

Throughout the region, we continue to experience a lack of political will and commitment on the part of Governments in developing and implementing policies addressing the priorities underlined in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and other international commitments. From an economic point of view, we have witnessed a general implementation of health policies inspired by neoliberal principles that transform patients with rights to sexual and reproductive health into consumers who can (or cannot) pay for their sexual and reproductive health. The situation continues to worsen as major funding streams have been withdrawn from the region.

Now, nearly 20 years after the Cairo and Beijing conferences, it is becoming urgent that Governments become more mindful of their women citizens and their needs and aspirations. It is high time to recognize that women are disproportionately

affected by sexual and reproductive health issues, and improving sexual and reproductive health outcomes should be viewed as critical to government efforts to improve women's status, eliminate gender inequality and prevent and combat all forms of violence against women.

Violations of reproductive rights and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services produce disturbing results for women and girls. The consequences become even more dramatic when combined with experience of any form of violence. It is fundamental to understand that those two spheres are interlinked and that, by placing much higher priority on reproductive health and rights, Governments contribute towards the prevention and elimination of various forms of violence against women and girls. In addition, comprehensive sexuality education programmes not only provide adolescents with knowledge about their bodies, sexuality and health, but also play a crucial role in strengthening young people's assertiveness and helping them to easily recognize dangerous situations such as harassment or sexual violence. Not ensuring to women equal rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of children and access to information, education and means to enable them to exercise those rights is a form of discrimination against women, as specified in articles 12 and 16 (1) (e) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Challenges in guaranteeing timely access to family planning services, including counselling, a full range of contraceptive methods with emergency contraception, antenatal care and legal abortion, significantly increase the vulnerability of girls and women, and international human rights bodies consider such cases to be human rights violations. The denial of emergency contraception and legal abortion services particularly affects violence survivors.

Taking into consideration that Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development identifies non-governmental organizations as an important and efficient means to focus local and national initiatives and to address pressing concerns regarding population, the environment, migration, economic and social development, we, representing organizations from Central and Eastern Europe comprising representatives of civil society organizations, including women, men, youth, people living with HIV/AIDS, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and intersex persons and sex workers, faith-based organizations and other networks and organizations throughout the region, call on our Governments:

(a) To recognize, implement and reinforce the commitments accepted in 1994, in particular the promise to promote and achieve sustainable development through a sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda, and to recognize its critical role for the improvement of women's status, the elimination of gender inequality and prevention and the combating of all forms of violence against women and girls;

(b) To renew their commitment to provide universal access to comprehensive sexuality education as an efficient and proven preventive measure; to make available the full range of contraceptive methods, including emergency contraception; to promote condoms, including female condoms, as a dual protection method; to guarantee access to a full range of abortion services and post-abortion care; to make available and guarantee a full range of medical services that prevent maternal deaths, especially emergency obstetric care, in adequately equipped

facilities; to provide the full range of services for the identification and treatment of victim-survivors of gender-based violence; to address sexually transmitted infections, and HIV/AIDS reproductive cancers, and to raise awareness of male responsibility in sexual and reproductive health, as well as to enunciate measures against stigma and discrimination in access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services;

(c) To adequately fund such medical services and pharmaceutical products in order to abide by the principle of equal access to health care, as well as to guarantee the individual right to non-discriminatory access to health care;

(d) To guarantee the implementation of sexual and reproductive health and rights policies by ensuring the functionality of health systems and providing adequate budgets, training for human resources and updated training and curricula for health professionals;

(e) To inform sexual and reproductive health and rights policies with intersectional analysis; to found these on data based on reproductive rights indicators; to include marginalized groups, especially Roma communities; and to use qualitative research input in order to ensure that these policies are continuously relevant;

(f) To base policy reviews on human rights paradigms in order to ensure that sexual and reproductive health are being recognized as human rights and that Governments are obliged to fulfil them, regardless of economic climate or political change;

(g) To ensure that general health and HIV-related policies, programmes and services are free of stigma and discrimination and are built on the fundamental commitment to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights and gender equality.

Representing the Central and Eastern European region, we also call on the United Nations Population Fund and development partners:

(a) To ensure the capacity enhancement of civil society to effectively engage with Governments and to participate in the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014 processes at the country, regional and global levels;

(b) To map civil society organizations at the national and regional levels to be involved in the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014 review process and in the global survey validation process;

(c) To convene, in conjunction with civil society organizations, “pre-conferences” to thematic conferences (women’s health and human rights) which will feed into the Secretary-General’s report;

(d) To work with civil society organizations to ensure meaningful representation in country delegations to thematic conferences and at the forty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development, in 2014;

(e) To recognize sexual and reproductive health and rights issues as fundamental and critical issues in Central and Eastern Europe and as a priority for their funding allocations;

(f) To provide assistance to mobilize resources and to facilitate the above-mentioned technical processes, as well as to create conditions that guarantee transparency and accountability for all budgetary allocations related to the International Conference on Population and Development.

The Federation for Women and Family Planning insists on the full recognition of sexual and reproductive health and rights not only as a part of the international human rights framework, but also as a part of basic health care, that can be used as a tool for the prevention and elimination of all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence.

In conclusion, we urge Governments, donors and international organizations to address the critical need for and take action towards the full implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, which is fundamental for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and for the advancement of women's status in the region.

The Federation for Women and Family Planning acts as a secretariat for the ASTRA Central and Eastern European Women's Network for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Health.
