Cambodia Intervention on
Population dynamics, sustainable development and climate change
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H.E. Poch Bunnak, Secretary of State, Ministry of Planning, RGC

Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Esteemed Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen!

Cambodia’s population age structure has undergone drastic changes since 1980s. In 1980s, the fertility was as high as 6 births per woman. The population annual growth rate was 2.5% and the age dependency ratio was 86.1 at that time. The rapid fertility decline is observed during 1995-2000, followed by a steady decline that brings down the fertility rate to 2.5 in 2019 and projected to reach the replacement level by 2030. This fertility trend opens up a window of opportunity for Cambodia, the demographic dividend that starts in the early 2000s and is expected to end around 2045-50.

In 2023, Cambodian population is 17 million, with the annual growth rate being 1.5%. The 15-64 working age population accounts for 66.2% of the total population and the age dependency ratio is as low as 55 dependents per 100 working age persons. If the current fertility trend continues, the ageing population would start to outnumber the children population after 2050 and ageing society would be apparent after 2060.

By adopting and translating the 1994 ICPD PoA and the 2013 Ministerial declaration into the national development policy frameworks and action, the maternal and child mortality rates, adolescent marriage and childbearing, and unmet need for family planning, as well as the incidence gender-based and spousal violence are declining, while the life expectancy at birth reached 75 years in 2019.

While Cambodia is enjoying the demographic dividend, with the GDP per capita growth reaching 11% in 2005 and averaging 7% thereafter until the covid-19 strike, we recognize that the number factor alone is not sufficient if we have to harvest the first demographic dividend and prepare for the second and third demographic dividends. Our current workforce's education and skills need to improve; gender inequality remains significant in a number of areas; geographical disparity on many development indicators needs further attention; and the impact of climate change needs further action as women, girls and the elderly are disproportionally affected.

The current government mandate continues to focus on investing in human capital as its first priority in the Pentagon Strategy Phase One 2024-2028. Now, the government is preparing a 5-years vocational training program that includes reskilling and upskilling of 1.5 million young adults with disadvantaged background and the planned structural transformation is underway to boost more decent jobs to meet the rapidly growing working age population and to improve the economic opportunity for young adults and their decent life, needed for the second dividend.

In addition, the RGC has established a Special Committee for Accelerating the Implementation of the ICPD PoA (SC-ICPD-PoA) and 25 sub-national committees at the provincial level to oversee and monitor the progress of the implementation of ICPD PoA and the 12 commitments. The Special Committee’s Strategic Framework and Action Plan 2024-2030 – CSFAP, aims at strengthening the legal framework and institutional capacity, expanding service availability and enhancing service quality, raising public awareness, cross-sectoral collaboration and partnerships, and mobilizing resources for achieving the 3 transformative outcomes.
We are strongly confident that the implementation of this Strategic Framework and Action Plan not only assures the timely achievement of ICPD PoA and commitments, but also accelerates the implementation of the National Population Policy 2016-2030, in which couples’ rights and freedom to decide on their number of children are fully respected and the framework for harvesting the dividend is outlined. The National Population Policy will be updated in due course to emphasize the dilemma between on-going economic contribution of the current workforce and possible ageing and labor shortage consequences in years to come.

Thank for your attention.