Statement by Mr. Madhusudan Burlakoti, Joint Secretary, MoHP, GoN
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Respected Chair, Excellences and Distinguished Delegates

Allow me at the outset to convey to you and all the respected delegates attending the Midterm Review of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development (APMD) warm greetings on behalf of my country Nepal and my delegation. I am honored at the invaluable opportunity to address this august gathering.

First of all, we express our sincere thanks to ESCAP and UNFPA for their support to the regional and national review processes of the APMD. The review process is an opportunity for this region to showcase its achievements and commitment to the continued implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and ensuring that no one is left behind in the development trajectory. It is also an opportunity for us to identify the key challenges and how best we can move forward. In this context, let me say at the onset that we welcome the development of an indicator framework for tracking progress in relation to APMD. We believe this will strengthen our collective efforts to identify more concretely the progress and gaps as well as enrich the quality of our reporting including in relation to the SDGs. My delegation is pleased to reaffirm today the 2013 Ministerial Declaration - it contains region-specific guidance for fulfilment of the ICPD Programme of Action and we recognize that progress on the key actions in the Ministerial Declaration will help advance the region’s progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – given the complementarity of the ICDP and SDG agendas.

Respected Chair

Let me now turn to our country context. In support of its vision of a rights-based and equitable welfare state, the Government of Nepal promulgated the new Constitution in 2015. After the successful elections at three tiers of government in 2017 as per the new federal structure, Nepal is currently putting in place state structures and human resources for legislative, executive and judiciary entities at all levels of government. This historic transition presents
Nepal with unique opportunities and tremendous potentials to advance the ICPD and SDG agendas in line with the ambition of Nepal to graduate to a middle income country by 2030.

Today, I take this opportunity to express our full conviction to the fact that universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights saves lives, improves health and well-being, helps women to access quality education and find decent work.

Nepal is fully committed to ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 5.6. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 enshrines safe motherhood, access to sexual and reproductive health and commitment to promoting equity and inclusiveness. In September 2018, the Federal Parliament of Nepal passed 16 bills related to the fundamental human rights of the Constitution including the Right to Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Bill.

Rights-based and progressive national laws, policies and programmes related to health and population implemented by Nepal since 1990 after the restoration of democracy have shown promising results. For instance, maternal mortality ratio has been reduced to 239 per 100,000 live births in 2016. The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel has increased from the 36% in 2011 to 58% in 2016. Several factors have contributed to the positive maternal and newborn outcomes in Nepal, such as increased use of modern contraception, increased births attended by skilled birth attendants, access to safe abortion care, and expansion of basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric care.

We recognize that greater efforts need to be made to reach marginalized groups, this includes communities who live in remote areas and do not have access to health services. It also includes communities that are marginalized due to their caste, sexual orientation and gender identity, persons with disability among others. The Constitution of Nepal aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on class, caste, language, religion and gender. The rights of gender and sexual minorities are explicitly recognized and protected. Given that inequalities
can be intersectional and often impact those that are particularly in vulnerable situations, we will advance policy measures that specifically target those communities that are left behind. We see great opportunity to reach the unreached under the new federal structure where local government authorities have greater autonomy to shape the development agenda and address the needs of their communities with targeted policies and programmes.

The Government of Nepal recognizes that adolescents and young people are often left behind and we have placed great emphasis on promoting their health and wellbeing through a range of policy measures and programme interventions. This includes efforts to integrate comprehensive sexuality education in the school curricula and offer out-of-school programmes consistent with the evolving capacities of adolescents. We consider this learning as critical for enabling young people with basic life skills and preparing them for adulthood. We are also upscaling youth friendly health services in existing public health facilities that offer sexual and reproductive health information and services to young people, with no legal or regulatory barriers including in relation to their age or marital status in recognition that young people are competent and need to seek confidential advice, counselling and services. Early marriage, early pregnancy and adolescent motherhood continue to be a key health concern for us in Nepal. According to the last Demographic Health Survey, 40% of Nepali women were married before the age of 18 and teenage fertility rate is increasing in the country. We, therefore, need to further build capacities at sub-national levels to take programmes to scale across the country in order to reach adolescents and young people with sexual and reproductive health services.

Distinguished Delegates

I take pride in stating here that in the last decades Nepal has witnessed a progressive policy environment for advancing gender equality and women’s rights. This is embedded in the legal reforms and the Constitution of Nepal 2015, resulting in significantly increasing the political participation of women, with women securing 29.5% of seats in national parliament and about 40% in local government, in the 2017 elections. However, gender based discrimination and violence against women are persisting issues in Nepal. The Government of Nepal recognizes
the need for transformative change in promoting women's equality and calls for addressing violence against women and girls; data indicates that 28.4% among women and girls aged 15 years and above face experiences of lifetime physical and/or sexual violence. Nepal, therefore, is supporting an integrated response to gender-based violence including in all sexual and reproductive health services and programmes, as part of a broader, multi-sectoral, coordinated response, and is ensuring that all survivors of violence have immediate access to critical services, including emergency contraception and safe abortion care.

Distinguished Delegates

I would like to stress that the SDG and ICPD agendas can be more effectively reached through building national capacities to integrate population dynamics in policy, planning and budgetary processes. The Government of Nepal has plans to update the Nepal Population Policy of 2015 in line with the population and development provisions under the Constitution as well as with the priority actions related to APMD which will provide a solid foundation for advancing the national and sub-national agendas for sustainable development.

Respected Chair and Distinguished Delegates

In closing, allow me to reinforce Nepal's commitment to further implementation of the APMD. The attainment of the ICPD and SDG agendas calls for strong partnerships. Nepal has produced good results through sector wide approaches in health and education in particular. The new federal structure will require intensive efforts to strengthen vertical and horizontal coordination and the leveraging of partnerships, across government bodies and with civil society organizations, the private sector and external development partners. The engagement of multiple partners that can leverage knowledge, expertise, reach and resources towards the shared goal of producing better development outcomes for all needs to be encouraged.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.