Chair
Excellences
Distinguished delegates

First and foremost, let me join previous speakers in congratulating the chairperson. Let me also congratulate other partners and agencies, including UNFPA and ESCAP, for the various roles this conference has entrusted to them.

Chair, the importance and relevance engagement of the Midterm Review of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development of the 5th Asia Pacific Population Conference (APPC) cannot be overemphasized. My country is relatively young with 80 per cent of the population live in rural areas and, in many small but concrete ways, we demonstrate and reaffirm our commitment to the International Conference on Population and Development of 1994 Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030. However, like other Pacific Island Countries, Solomon Islands is faced with economic, environmental and social challenges which we must overcome with the very limited financial and technical resources and stretched capacity (including for data collection, analysis and dissemination) if we are to improve the quality of life of all our people.

On sexual reproductive health and rights, while we have improved our efforts, we note with concern the low rate of contraceptive prevalence at 27%, an unacceptably high prevalence of unintended teenage pregnancies at 68 per 1000 women 15-19 years, and a trend of increasing rates of STIs among our young people. However, we are pleased to note that with the current increased momentum of our programme efforts in voluntary family planning we have yielded positive results, for example, in the recent Ministry of Health Core Indicators report, 1,333 unintended pregnancies were averted between 2016 and 2017. But, we recognise that continuing to expand and strengthen family planning programmes to ensure that all couples and individuals have access to information and quality services is crucial. Working with elected parliamentary leaders, faith based and cultural leaders to better advocate for family planning is
Partnerships with NGOs are important in this regard. The Solomon Islands aims to reduce maternal mortality from 146 per 100,000 to 100 per 100,000 live births by 2015. Our national plans include to address unmet need for family planning, especially among vulnerable and underserved populations, increase the number of supervised delivery by trained skilled birth attendants from 85% to 95% in the next 4 years, ensure access to basic and comprehensive obstetric care through quality services and referrals systems and increase antenatal and postnatal coverage. We have a strong commitment to providing information and services in line with the right of all individuals, without discrimination of any kind, to enjoy the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health.

Many global events are currently drawing attention to the gender injustices and inequalities that still exist, and this is also the case in the Solomon Islands. National VAW prevalence rates reveal that approximately 2 out of 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of intimate partners, in their lifetimes. We are therefore striving to effectively implement policies and action plans to promote gender equality, women’s empowerment and combat violence against women and girls, in order to achieve a meaningful change for equality, participation, peace and development not just for some, but for all. We recognize the need to strengthen the SAFENET system of prevention and referral and ensure that services for victims and survivors are available in even the most remote island communities and during natural disasters. In influencing such policies, however, the lack of women’s representation on statutory and other decision-making bodies continues to be a cause of concern. Since Independence in 1978, only three women have ever been elected to the national parliament.

Our population is our most important resource as it provides the pool of labour force for development in the Solomon Islands. In fact, the pace and direction of our national development depends on the human resource we have – and we have plenty of it! However, our very youthful population with a median age of less than 20 years and youth unemployment may present population challenges that could be a constraint to national development and stability. Our high rate of population growth at 2.3 per cent and our demographic structure creates pressure on our capacity to provide basic goods and services, protect our environment and maintain political and economic stability and freedom. In the long run, significant improvements in living standards could be difficult to achieve without the right policies and investment, including from development partners. Expanding access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services, including for unmarried, and continuing to work towards ensuring the availability comprehensive sexuality education in all our public and private schools and institutions is therefore critical to the health and well-being of our young people and, ultimately, our social and economic development –potentially by reaping the demographic dividend.

In conclusion, Solomon Islands remains committed to the goals and objectives of the ICPD. Chair, among other things, the main constraints we face in accelerating progress on all fronts are the lack of critical
Financial and physical resources and institutional capacity. At the same time certain trends and developments are posing serious challenges to us, including high youth unemployment and limited services and infrastructure in remote and hard to reach locations.

However, as the journey towards the 2030 agenda has begun, the Solomon Islands calls for a comprehensive, integrated and transformative development agenda that is inclusive - leaving no one behind, including the most vulnerable and marginalised. We call for development frameworks that address the structural causes of inequalities and impact the realisation of human rights, including as a consequence of the unequal power relations in society. We recommend that ICPD monitoring frameworks in our region take into consideration the social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities of a country such as ours, and the resulting challenges for sustainable, human rights-based and gender responsive development.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.