Opening Remarks
Laura Londén
Deputy Executive Director (Management), United Nations Population Fund

Asia Pacific Population Conference
Mid-term Review

26-28 November 2018
Bangkok
Excellencies,  

Distinguished delegates,  

Partners, Colleagues and Friends,  

It is a great pleasure to welcome you today, together with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, to this Mid-Term Review of the Asia Pacific Population Conference.  

The APPC is the longest-standing regional conference on population and development, a testament to the historic importance of these issues in this region. The last time we met, five years ago, you analyzed the trends and policies in place and identified the barriers you faced in fulfilling the ICPD Programme of Action. And you set out your vision of the best way to move forward amidst the transition from the MDGs to the 2030 Agenda. The result was captured in the Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development.  

Today, we are five years into the implementation of this Declaration and 25 years into efforts to achieve the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.  

The International Conference on Population and Development was a central moment in sustainable development. It was in Cairo 25 years ago that 179 Member States endorsed the ICPD Programme of Action, thereby shifting the population debate from one of human numbers to one of human rights. In Cairo, world leaders recognized that investing in individual capabilities, dignity and human rights is the foundation of sustainable development.
I am very excited by the engagement, from government delegates, civil society, young and older people, and those of all abilities, gathered together to discuss some of the region’s most pressing issues in the area of population and development.

Over the next two days, we have a historic opportunity to celebrate our progress on the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration, and in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, to share experiences, and to redouble our efforts to reach those who are still left behind.

This region’s deliberations are vital not only for the countries assembled here but for the world. The demographic transformations we see in the Asia Pacific region represent the diversity of experiences around the world today.

**Significant progress**

Over the course of the next three days, Member States will present progress, gaps, challenges and lessons learned. And later today, you will hear in detail about the review reports that ESCAP and UNFPA have jointly produced, using national reports, regional data, and the most up-to-date research.

Allow me, distinguished delegates, to highlight some of the key findings for your deliberations.

Across this region there have been great gains in the 25 years of the Programme of Action. We are closer to achieving our goal of ensuring that every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.

Poverty reduction has advanced in this region faster than any other in the world.
Many countries have extended the reach of essential health-care services to more than two thirds of their population. Some have done so free of charge and others through low-cost public health insurance. As a result, people’s out-of-pocket expenditures on health care have fallen around the region.

More women have access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, empowering them to make choices about their bodies, their lives and their families. Adolescent fertility has fallen across the region. Since 2013, maternal mortality rates have decreased or stabilized in every country in the region, driven by significant improvements in maternal care, particularly antenatal care and skilled attendance at birth.

Young people benefit from better access to education and are more involved in decisions affecting their futures. People are living longer and more healthily than ever before. Both life expectancy and healthy life expectancy increased in most of the Asia-Pacific region between 2000 and 2015. This is part of the success of human-centered development that is bringing about population ageing.

Finally, data quality has improved and is being used to measure, monitor, track and improve policy outcomes.

**Gaps and Challenges Remain**

But the journey is far from complete. The prospects for every 10-year-old girl today to enjoy good health, rights and well-being over the course of her life are far from certain.
As the review reports show, too many people are still left behind and are not able to contribute their full potential to our societies.

Informal and vulnerable employment remain high, accounting for more than half of those working in many countries. Women’s labour force participation has stagnated in South-East Asia and fallen in South Asia, reinforced by gender inequality. Across 33 countries in the region, the odds of a woman being employed full-time are 21 per cent lower than those of a man, and for a woman with children they are 28 per cent lower. Women face barriers to employment including child, early and forced marriage, lack of control over fertility, insufficient education and more.

Ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health and rights is a core component of the Programme of Action and its human rights-based approach. While many countries in the region have progressed in this area, disparities still exist, particularly between rural and urban areas and income groups. These gaps need to be closed to ensure that all women can exercise their reproductive rights, regardless of circumstance.

Gender-based violence persists, threatening the health, safety, freedom, and at times the very survival of women and their families. Available data from across the region show little change in the proportion of women suffering physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the past 12 months – with more than a quarter of women in several countries reporting such violence.

Secondary education completion is very unequal by gender, with many girls left behind in South and South-West Asia, while other countries are seeing girls surge ahead and boys fall behind.
Youth employment is a major concern. At 10.8 per cent, Asia and the Pacific overall has a youth unemployment rate below the world average. Yet this figure masks large differences between countries, and especially in North and Central Asia, where the youth unemployment rate is 14.9 per cent. Ensuring the empowerment, education and employment of every young person is vital for realizing prospects for the demographic dividend, especially as the window of opportunity starts to close in countries that are ageing. A number of countries in East and North-East Asia and South-East Asia are rapidly ageing. To prepare for this, they need to invest in social protection, health systems, age-friendly infrastructure and more.

Countries are attempting to address all of these challenges amidst the unprecedented and expanding threats climate change brings. The Asia-Pacific is already the most disaster-prone region in the world, and climate change is likely to increase the number of people affected by disasters.

In this new and changing environment, your successes, your challenges, and the hard lessons you have learned in implementing the Ministerial Declaration and the ICPD Programme of Action are essential for realizing the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda.

**The Ministerial Declaration and the 2030 Agenda**

Excellencies, delegates, colleagues and friends,

These gains and these challenges reveal how far we have come, and how far we have left to go. All of us have a responsibility to fulfill our commitments.
This conference is once again part of a global process. In the past four months, each region of the world has reviewed their progress since their 2013 regional conference on population and development. Next year, 25 years after Cairo, the Commission on Population and Development will conduct a full review of the ICPD Programme of Action and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda. And this will inform the first full review of the 2030 Agenda in the UN General Assembly.

Your leadership in this region as Member States, civil society organizations, academia and development partners has been critical to our collective progress since Cairo and since 2013. It will be no less so as we accelerate towards 2030. So it is critical that the outcomes of this conference are transmitted to the Commission on Population and Development for the global review, and are a major part of review of the 2030 Agenda at national, regional and global levels.

I know that this region will shine brightly on the global stage because of your actions and the outcomes of this conference.

Alongside our sister agencies, UNFPA stands ready to support you, as we work together to ensure rights, choices, progress and sustainable development for all.

Thank you.