Vanuatu Country Statement

Delivered at the sixth Mid–Term Review of the Asian and Pacific Population Conference

Mr/Madam Chair,

Excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the government of the Republic of Vanuatu, allow me to convey our gratitude to the work of UNESCAP and UNFPA in organizing this Mid Term Review of the 6th Asian and Pacific Population Conference. The Government of Vanuatu recognizes the relevance of the ICPD agenda as much today as it was in 1994, and reaffirm our commitment to the Ministerial Declaration of the 6th APPC adopted in 2013.

Five years after the 6th APPC, the Government of Vanuatu has seen some good progress in several areas, however, some persistent challenges call for strategic and sustained interventions, and continued international cooperation to fulfill the promise of ICPD and to meet the aspirational goals of the 2030 Development Agenda.

Mr/Madam Chair,

Concerning Poverty eradication and employment, the applicability of absolute poverty in Vanuatu is disputed on the grounds that social safety nets and access to customary land provide a cushion for communities. However, we are seeing urban poverty and high youth unemployment as an urgent and persistent concern, with increasing urbanization.

In the spirit of SDG 4 (Quality Education), investments in education and skills building are essential to expand human capabilities, and support the readiness of young people for labour market opportunities that arise. The Government of Vanuatu is committed to drive the creation of and expansion of small and
medium enterprises (SMEs) including youth and women ownership of SMEs to enable young people to generate income and promote entrepreneurship.

Vanuatu reaffirms its commitments to the Moana Declaration to “uphold the importance of promoting human rights, and development of human capital, notably through health, education and positive behaviour change, throughout the life cycle”.

As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Vanuatu recalls commitments made by the SAMOA Pathway to “enhance international cooperation, exchanges and investments in formal and non-formal education and training to create an environment that supports sustainable investments and growth for all people, including women, youth and persons with disabilities”.

Equally important is the potential of universal access to voluntary reproductive health services including family planning, in reducing poverty. This would in turn increase the labour force participation rates of women and raise average per capita family income. With lower fertility, the age composition of the population would be more conducive to economic growth and employment growth.

Mr/Madam Chair,

Concerning Health, Vanuatu is challenged by the double burden of communicable and Non-communicable diseases (NCD), 19% of adult population is obese, 51% overweight and 29% has high blood pressure. NCDs, such as diabetes is increasing in Vanuatu.

Promoting healthy behaviours at an early age is part of recognizing that, prevention of NCDs is the only long term way to address the issue. In keeping with the Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan we are committed to reducing risk factors for NCDs through the promotion of healthy behaviours among children and adolescents through school health intervention programmes.

Comprehensive funding and technical assistance is needed for strategic and sustained interventions to fully address the burden of NCDs in Vanuatu.
Mr /Madam chair,

On Sexual and reproductive health services and rights, contraceptive prevalence rate for modern methods is low at 37%. Unmet need for contraceptives remain high at 24.4%. These trends indicate reproductive rights and choices are yet to be fully realized. We are still in progress with universal health coverage, particularly as We continue to see maternal, infant and neonatal deaths and stunning in under 5 children.

There are challenges in strengthening the health system, particularly in reaching rural populations, to access basic health-care services, is essential for improving health, life expectancy and related social and economic outcomes. We are committed to improving access to basic health-care services including for reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH), and is supportive of the realization of reproductive rights, expanding reproductive choices and promoting universal access to reproductive health.

Vanuatu reaffirms its commitments made in the Yanuca Declaration and its healthy islands vision for the Pacific to “Strengthen service provision to ensure child health, including provision of prenatal and maternal care “are realized.

We remain committed also, to the aspirations of the Moana Declaration to “ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all our peoples, without discrimination” and to the KAILA Declaration, to strengthen human resource capacity and building competencies for RMNCAH through Workforce Assessment and trainings.

Consequently, Vanuatu has reaffirmed its commitments to building human resources capacity by embarking on a National Human Resources Development plan.

Mr Chair/Madam,

On education. Vanuatu’s literacy rate is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas as a result of increasing access to education. We remain committed to striking a balance in this proportion to make education accessible to all through the Vanuatu Inclusive Education Policy, which makes special emphasis on marginalized, vulnerable and people with disabilities.

We are rolling out an ambitious new curriculum across basic education, incorporating gender equality, social inclusion and human rights as well as appropriate sexual and reproductive health and rights learning for all.
Mr Chair/Madam,

On Gender equality and women’s empowerment, while we have seen some progress in gender equality, structural inequalities undermine equitable and sustainable development, and the prospects of women and girls.

Gender based violence is a serious, widespread and persistent problem in Vanuatu. Three in five women who had ever been in a relationship have experienced either physical or sexual violence (or both) by a husband or intimate partner; and almost half were currently experiencing it.

Vanuatu has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the Pacific with 9% of girls married before the age of 15 and 27% married before they turn 18. The Government has prioritized gender equality and prevention of gender based violence as an integral part of social development, but needs continued support from international partners to fully implement programs and monitor gender policy objectives articulated in the National Population Policy, the Gender Policy, the Family Protection Act and the Vanuatu Child Protection Policy.

Mr Chair/Madam,

On Adolescents and young people, Young people under the age of 30 years account for 68% of the total population in Vanuatu. Teenage pregnancy is strongly associated with low level of education attainment. Our pressing concern is the increasing adolescent birth rate 81%. The Government is committed in the National Population Policy (Goal 1) to address high fertility and unintended pregnancy; as well as in the Vanuatu Reproductive Maternal, Child, Newborn and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) Policy seeks expansion of integrated RMNCAH services in support of universal access to SRH and to realize reproductive rights including for young people.

Mr Chair/Madam,

On Population and sustainable development, the 2016 Mini-Census found that 88% of households engage in some form of vegetable crop production, 57% in cash crop production, 69% engaged in livestock production and 49% engaged in fishing.

However, Climate change is a significant threat to Vanuatu’s population and sustainable development. Vanuatu is the world’s most at-risk country for natural
disasters according to the UN World Risk Index. Therefore, for population and development interventions to continue to deliver in the face of these hazards, they need to be resilient with effective plans in place to ensure continuity of services. The Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy is aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Pacific’s KAILA Declaration.

Mr Chair/Madam,

On Data and Statistics, We are concerned that there are challenges in our data and statistics collection but want to remain committed to increased financing across the national statistical system to improve the availability of timely, reliable and high quality statistics, and development partners are supporting the realisation of the data revolution, notably in the use of administrative data from the health, education, tax and revenue sectors.

Mr Chair/Madam, in conclusion, Vanuatu’s persistent challenges are clear and urgent:

- Expand delivery of integrated RMNCAH services to realize reproductive rights, unmet need for contraception particularly for young people.
- Universal access to voluntary reproductive health services including family planning, as an effective poverty reduction strategy
- Optimize in Vanuatu’s demographic dividend through investments in education and skills building to expand human capabilities, and support the readiness of young people for labour market opportunities that arise
- Reducing risk factors for NCDs through the promotion of healthy behaviours among children and adolescents through school programs and community ongoing services.
- Strengthening the health system, particularly to reach rural populations, to access basic health-care services, is essential for improving health, life expectancy and related social and economic outcomes
- Universal access to reproductive health and expansion of reproductive health rights and choices without discrimination particularly in relation to young people, marginalized, Vulnerable, persons with disabilities and populations affected by disasters and emergencies.
- Continued support and international cooperation to fully implement and monitor gender policy objectives that address gender base violence and promote the empowerment of women and girls
- strategic and sustainable interventions to address the increasing adolescent birth rate
- Strengthen public and private sector functions to be resilient in the face of disasters and emergencies to deliver population and development Services.

The ICPD agenda and the 6th APPC Ministerial Declaration is relevant to the prosperity and the wellbeing of the people of Vanuatu and it supports the Vanuatu National Sustainable Development Plan 2030 which recognizes cultural and social values for the protection of the human rights of all people including women, children, young people, marginalized, Vulnerable and people with special needs.

I thank you Mr Chair/Madame Chair