

**Regional Conference on International Conference on Population and  
Development (ICPD)  
Geneva 19 and 20 October 2023**

**Statement by Mr. Pasi Hellman, Under-Secretary of State (Development Policy),  
Finland**

Excellencies,

Dear Participants,

I'm honored to have the opportunity to speak here today. I would like to extend our gratitude to the UN Economic Commission for Europe and UNFPA for their efforts in organizing this Regional Conference.

Sustainable development and prosperity for all thrives when human rights and freedoms are respected.

As stated in the Cairo Programme of Action in 1994, population policies should be based on people's dignity and rights - these are at the heart of sustainable development. The right of women and girls to make decisions about their own bodies is the leading principle.

The message conveyed in this year's State of the World Population Report is profound. Family planning and the right to sexual and reproductive autonomy are central to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment and they play a vital role in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

In Finland, our experience is that the inclusion of women in the workforce is strongly linked to sustainable social and economic development.

Promoting parental leave, equal job opportunities, supporting families in all their diversity and improving access to family planning is the foundation of creating resilient societies that can thrive, no matter how the population changes.

Our primary focus should be on the right to choose. We firmly believe that individuals have the right to determine the number and timing of their children. Finland is currently piloting to provide free contraceptives to young people under 25.

Dear Participants,

Promoting the empowerment of women and girls and ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is a long-term priority in Finland's foreign and development policy.

We much appreciate UNFPA's dedication to addressing global family planning needs, reducing maternal mortality, and ending gender-based violence in both development and humanitarian settings.

We call upon ending and responding to all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Finland has implemented this for example by adopting a new definition on rape in the Criminal Code that is based on consent.

To make informed choices, women and girls need comprehensive knowledge of their rights and available options. Schools play a pivotal role in providing comprehensive sexuality education and science-based information to help adolescents and youth protect themselves and make informed decisions about their future.

Let me say next a few words about technology and innovation.

Innovation is in our European and Finnish DNA. Technology and innovation have the potential to advance the empowerment of women and girls by providing better access to information and to reproductive services.

However, for this to happen, women need access to science, digital technology, and innovation. It's important to acknowledge that the benefits of innovation and technological change are not equally distributed, especially in low-income countries where only one in five women have access to the internet.

This is why Finland is committed to supporting global efforts aimed at expanding women's and girls' access to digital technologies, learning, and skills. Our leadership role in the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality reflects this commitment.

Dear Participants,

It's imperative to eradicate structural inequalities and all forms of discrimination.

Innovations may give a solution to ensure that sexual and reproductive health services are accessible to everyone.

We encourage UNFPA to continue excellent work through the Equity 2030 Alliance and efforts to ensure that women and girls fully benefit and are engaged in science and technology.

Finland's social innovation of maternity and child health clinic model has played a significant role in maintaining almost zero maternal and infant mortality rates.

In Finland, we provide equal access to high-quality, free education for all children, including those with disabilities, as the cornerstone of an equal society.

Support to education is high on Finland's development cooperation agenda. To mention an example, Finland hosts a new UNICEF Innovative Learning Hub, which may bring new openings to the global education crisis. A further impetus for comprehensive sexuality education is needed.

Furthermore, partnership between the civil society, private sector and the governments is required to attain the SDGs. Finnish private sector companies are contributing, among others, to global solutions in the areas of health innovation and digital health.

Responsibility and accountability will empower us all to implement the Agenda 2030 for the benefit of future generations.

Thank you.