

**Opening Remarks by Dr. Natalia Kanem
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Fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Population and Development**

Monday 19 April 2021 | 10:00-10:55

Mr. Chairperson,
Deputy Secretary-General,
Your Majesty Queen Mother Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck of Bhutan
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Civil society friends,
Dear colleagues,

It is an honour to address this 54th session of the Commission on Population and Development.

Food is fundamental.

nutrition and agricultural policies and programmes with special attention to the creation and

In observi , we must remember that on every continent, whether in development or crisis settings, the prevalence of food insecurity is higher among women. Within households, it is often women and girls who eat last and least. When they are pregnant or breastfeeding, this spells disaster for mother and newborn.

Now, what was already bad has been made worse by COVID-19. The pandemic is causing a spike in poverty and, consequently, food insecurity and undernutrition, which in pregnancy increases the risk of low-birth-weight babies, obstructed labour, premature births, and maternal and newborn deaths.

Indeed, nutrition programmes count among the most cost-effective interventions for lifelong health. Delivery of such programmes must continue, pandemic or not, to ensure that women and children across the world survive and thrive.

The pandemic has been hard on everyone – older people, migrants, those living with disabilities, indigenous peoples and people of African descent.

Young people face disrupted education and obstacles to finding work.

Yet and still, COVID-19, as we see an upsurge in gender-based violence, in child marriage, in adolescent pregnancy and COVID-19

The International Conference on Population and Development sat in Cairo 27 years ago and reached global consensus. Delegates from all regions recognized that health and well-being, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, gender equality, and education were at the very heart of development.

This vision was reiterated in multiple reviews, including the ICPD Beyond 2014 review, and this very Commission has linked the success of the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 in 2019 reinvigorated the movement, mobilizing political will to accelerate the achievement of the Cairo agenda and the SDGs by 2030. I am encouraged that despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, we see progress in advancing the Nairobi commitments, proof that the world is serious about realizing this transformative agenda for women and girls.

Today, as we meet under the auspices of this landmark Commission, we must show the world that the nourishing of the aspirations of women, girls indeed, everyone will not escape our grasp. Let there be no obstacle to a resounding consensus that food security and nutrition underpin all the sustainable development goals and