

**Fifth Meeting of the Regional Conference on Population and
Development of Latin America and the Caribbean and
Extraordinary Session “10 years of the Montevideo Consensus on
Population and Development”**

Opening ceremony

Wednesday, July 3, 2024

09:30 - 10:15

**Opening Remarks by Susana Sottoli, Regional Director, UNFPA
LACRO**

- **Mr. Luis Gilberto Murillo Urrutia** Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia
- **Mr. Javier Medina Vásquez**, Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
- **Mr. Sergio Cusicanqui**, Minister of Development Planning of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the country serving as Chair of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean
- **Mrs. Noemí Espinoza**, Ambassador-at-large of Honduras for Women’s Affairs and Chair of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development of the United Nations
- **Mr. Simone Cecchini**, Director of CELADE/ECLAC
- **Mr. Luis Yáñez**, Secretary of the Commission, ECLAC
- Heads of government delegations of Latin America and the Caribbean
- Representatives of civil society organizations
- Colleagues from international organizations and the United Nations system
- Ladies and gentlemen, friends.

It is a great pleasure to be here in this historic city. My special thanks go to our hosts, the government of Colombia, for their leadership and substantive

involvement in this conference. And I take this opportunity to join in thanking Minister Sergio Cusicanqui and the government of Bolivia for their commitment as the head of the board of directors of this conference. And, of course, to our colleagues at ECLAC.

We meet today as part of the journey from Cairo to Cartagena de Indias... It has been 30 years since the International Conference on Population and Development was held in Cairo, and today, we meet to evaluate the progress of these last three decades and renew the commitment formulated then to fulfill the promise of a world with rights and opportunities for all people.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Montevideo Consensus included and expanded key points of the Cairo Programme of Action, becoming a key reference for promoting public policies in favor of equality, sexual and reproductive rights, and the elimination of gender violence.

Every step and every action taken by governments, communities, organizations, and individuals has contributed to millions of people benefiting from the progress achieved. There are 8 billion people in the world, and there is a story behind every number.

Let me share the story of three generations of indigenous women in Bolivia whose life stories reflect this 30-year trajectory of change since Cairo. The grandmother represents the first generation, 72 years old, illiterate, with a life marked by a lack of opportunities. She watches with pride as her 51-year-old daughter has accessed more opportunities than her. Despite two unplanned pregnancies, the daughter was able to open her own store and send her daughters to school. Her granddaughter, 31 years old, is currently studying at university and leads an economic entrepreneurship that provides her with economic autonomy and makes decisions about her body together with her partner, something that her grandmother and her mother were never able to do.

Certainly, the story of this family tells us about the advances we have witnessed in our region in the last 30 years.

- Indeed, in Latin America and the Caribbean, maternal deaths have been reduced as women have access to family planning and the care of trained health personnel.

- Between 2000 and 2023, access to modern contraceptives increased by 9.3%. Teenage pregnancies decreased by 37.6%.
- And the number of countries with legislation addressing domestic violence increased from 20 in the year 2000 to 30 in 2021.

Nonetheless, the data also reveals that millions of people still face obstacles to fully exercising their rights:

- Almost half of all pregnancies in the region are unintended;
- 9 countries are among the 60 with the highest adolescent fertility rate in the world;
- the number of preventable maternal deaths almost doubled between 2020 and 2022;
- 1 in 3 women experience violence in their lifetime, and gender-based violence continues to be tolerated, including in emergencies.
- 14 of the 25 countries in the world with the highest rates of femicide are found in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Thirty years after Cairo and 11 years after the Montevideo Consensus, we find ourselves at a critical turning point. We must accelerate efforts if we want the promise of Cairo to become a reality for millions of girls, adolescents, and women in our region.

In the context of demographic diversity that characterizes our region, with countries that still have the demographic bonus of a growing population of productive age, and others where a change in population dynamics towards aging is already observed, it is necessary to invest appropriately at each stage of people's lives, taking into account their specific needs.

The cost of inaction could set us back decades. For example, according to data collected by UNFPA in 10 countries in the region, not investing in reducing teenage pregnancy costs 9.5 billion dollars a year, which represents an average of 0.38% of annual GDP. Together with partners, UNFPA is working on similar estimates to quantify the cost of inaction in ageing societies or those facing a regression in terms of gender equality.

The promise of Cairo could not be more relevant and urgent today, especially as we prepare for the Summit of the Future in New York next September.

Esteemed participants,

On behalf of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), I am pleased to participate in the Fifth Meeting of the Regional Conference on Population and Development. We will continue to support the countries of the region in transforming Cairo's promise into a tangible reality so that each person has the opportunity to thrive in a fair and inclusive environment.

Regarding the advances and challenges of inclusion in LAC, I would like to invite you to visit the exhibition in the Hall Grau, where, through a multimedia exhibit, we give voice to women and young people who bear witness to these 30 years since Cairo. Tomorrow at 1 p.m., we will also have the regional launch of our flagship publication, *State of World Population 2024*, where we will have a conversation with three special guests.

I hope you can join us in continuing this conversation about the progress made in recent years and the challenges that lie ahead.

I wish you all a fruitful and productive meeting.

Thank you.