

Joint Statement to the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

June 17-19, 2013 – United Nations, New York

Delivered by H.E. Ambassador Jose Luis Cancela, Permanent Representative of Uruguay to the United Nations, on behalf of the Governments of Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Mozambique, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Rwanda, South Africa, Slovenia, Turkey, United Kingdom and Switzerland.

It is my pleasure to present this statement which calls for a greatly needed focus on very important aspects of the rights-based agenda that we aspire to build, on behalf of my delegation and the following Member States: Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Mozambique, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Portugal, Rwanda, South Africa, Slovenia, Turkey, United Kingdom.¹

Despite progress, large sectors of our global community live in poverty and are otherwise excluded from equal opportunities, with limited protections of their human rights, undermining their quality of life, full potential and sustainable development. Women, and adolescents and youth, are the two largest demographic groups in the world facing inequalities, limited choices and restricted freedoms, including in education, health, social protection, decent work, livelihood and economic opportunities. Too many women, children, adolescent girls and youth are illiterate, out of school, unemployed, underemployed, in the informal sector, without effective legal protections from abuse and exploitation, and facing limited prospects for a better life.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights and the right to live free of gender-based violence are human rights. The neglect of these rights further entrenches inequalities and erodes educational attainment, health and labour force participation, to the detriment of the lives affected, but also to prospects for achieving sustainable development across its social, economic and environmental dimensions, and undermining opportunities for bringing into balance population and development dynamics with the planet's resources.

The respect, protection and fulfillment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, without discrimination on any grounds, must be the basis of a new global sustainable development agenda rooted in principles of equality, equity and social justice for all so that 'no one is left behind'.

We therefore consider that Governments, in collaboration with the UN System, civil society and other partners, must accelerate efforts to:

* Eliminate gender- and age-discriminatory legal provisions and practices across social, cultural, economic, civil and political rights, including to ensure equal rights to education, health, social protection, decent work and income-earning opportunities.

¹ The countries that are members of the G77 align themselves with the statement delivered by Fiji on behalf of that Group.

* In the area of education, particular attention must be paid to eliminating illiteracy among women, children, adolescent girls and young people; universal access to at least secondary education for all children and eliminating gender gaps at all levels of education; improving the quality and content of education and facilitating school-to-work transitions for youth; and protecting children from sexual harassment, bullying and violence in school. Special supports should be provided for pregnant girls, young mothers and fathers, and children affected by HIV and disabilities to be able to complete their education.

* In the area of decent work, employment and social protection, emphasis must be placed on ensuring women's equal pay with men, equal land, property and inheritance rights, access to productive assets and financial services, agricultural supports and technologies and ICTs; gender-responsive, family-friendly labour policies and social protection systems, including affordable childcare, care for older persons, people living with HIV or persons with disabilities, and paternity and maternity leave policies; elimination of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace; and elimination of discrimination in employment based on HIV, pregnancy or motherhood.

* In the area of health and population dynamics, fulfill the 'unfinished' promise of the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action and the MDGs to ensure universal access to health care, in particular quality, affordable sexual and reproductive health information, education and services, with priority attention to women, adolescents and youth, and communities living in poverty; provide universal access to comprehensive sexuality education for all young people, in and out of school, in a manner consistent with their evolving capacities; and create an enabling environment through legal and policy reforms and public education for the exercise of human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights by all, without discrimination, coercion or violence on any grounds.

* Foster shared rights and responsibilities of men and boys in private and public life, and end violence against women and girls, including through sustained prevention campaigns and universal access to services and rehabilitation for all survivors; and end harmful practices against girls, including early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, within a generation.

We urge that the human rights and empowerment of women and girls and gender equality, the rights and empowerment of adolescents and youth, and the respect, protection and fulfillment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all must be positioned as critical pillars of the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, and essential to achieving the MDGs and equitable, inclusive sustainable development. These are matters of human rights and human dignity, first and foremost, universally-relevant priorities for all people and countries.