



**MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Address by Minister Jackson Mthembu**

**At the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)**

**Held at KICC, in Nairobi, Kenya**

**14 November 2019**

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**Honourable President Uhuru Kenyatta of the Republic of Kenya, representatives of the Danish Government, Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, Ms Amina Jane Mohammed, Executive Director of the UNFPA, Dr Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of UN Women, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**

**Distinguished Guests**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

We bring warm greetings and best wishes from the Republic of South Africa, the home of the world rugby champions, its people and our leader, President Cyril Ramaphosa.

South Africa was a new democracy, barely 6 months old, when the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was held in Cairo, in September 1994. The interim Constitution which governed the new democratic state, had introduced a Bill of Rights which articulated the vision of a South Africa that will seek to secure

fundamental human rights for ALL people without distinction of any kind. It is this interim constitution that allowed for South Africa's human rights stance at the Conference, even before the adoption of the final Constitution on 08 May 1996 which came into effect on 04 February 1997.

The Cairo conference signalled a shift from population policies that focused on population and fertility control, to developmental population policies that are inclusive and promoted reproductive justice which introduced reproductive choice and the investment in the human person. The South African Constitution affirms the Right to Bodily Integrity including control over reproduction. The Right to Bodily Integrity is at the centre of the protection of human dignity and thereby placed a positive duty on the new democratic government of South Africa to put in place progressive Population and Development policies and laws; among these being the Civil Union Act, which legalised same-sex marriage, making South Africa the fifth country in the world and the first in Africa to allow legal marriages between same-sex couples, thereby protecting the rights of the LGBTQI Community.

Our constitution informed by the universal human rights principles and the values of non-discrimination that emerged from decades of struggle, together with the progressive agenda that arose from 1994 Cairo Conference, laid the basis for a range of South African policies and laws premised on holistic development of our society and its people. These include the expansion of access to the social wage to poor communities, composed of free health care for young children and pregnant women, free basic electricity, water, sanitation and refuse removal as well as low cost housing.

Despite the new policies and laws our society is still struggling to overcome the devastation caused by the stunting, migration, population control and skewed social and economic development that underpinned apartheid era population policies that were rooted in ideologies of discrimination and exclusion.

To date, two-thirds of children do not pay school-fees, and over 9 million children are fed each school day through the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). Our social grants programme benefits over 17 million South Africans.

We have decreased our Maternal Mortality from 176.22 deaths per 100 000 live births in the 2008-2010 to 138 deaths per 100 000 live births in the 2014-2016; the Infant Mortality Rate has decreased from 53.2 per 1 000 live births in 2002 to 36.4 per 1 000 live births in 2018 and Under-5 mortality rates have decreased from 80.1 per 1000 live births in 2002 to 45 per 1000 live births in 2018. The mortality rates are still high and more can be done.

We have expanded Reproductive health care through various programmes such as:

- The Integrated School Health Programme which focuses on addressing both the immediate health problems of learners, including barriers to teaching and learning as well as implementing interventions that can promote their health and well-being during childhood and beyond;
- Our department of health has also introduced programmes such as (i) B-Wise - a young person's interactive cell phone health platform to empower adolescents and youth to make the right choices based on accurate information. (ii) She

Conquers Campaign - A youth-led campaign which will run for 3-years collaborating with government, NGOs, business, and civil society to address the major issues that adolescent girls and young women face in South Africa today.

- South Africa has over the last 25 years embarked on a number of legislative and policy interventions which focus on the sexual health and wellbeing of young people, as well as providing for women to choose a contraceptive method that they prefer. The Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act which was passed in 1996 has ensured deaths from unsafe abortion has declined by more than 90%. Access to Primary Health Care Services measured in terms of visits per annum, increased from some 67 million in 1998 to over 128 million in March 2018. Furthermore, the total numbers of new HIV infections declined from 270 000 in 2016 to 231 000 in 2018.
- South Africa is currently also in the process of decriminalising sex work to ensure that the sex work industry is regulated and that women are protected.

Notwithstanding strides we have made in our population development, South Africa continues to commit itself in Accelerating the Promise made in Cairo twenty-five years ago by tackling the challenges identified for this 2019 Nairobi Summit on #ICPD25, which include:

- Zero unmet need for family planning information and services;
- Zero preventable maternal deaths;
- Zero sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls: referred to as Ukuthwalwa;
- Provided detail for implementing second phase of the democratic transition.

The newly completed 5 year plan for our 6<sup>th</sup> democratic administration as Government assert that South Africa will in the next five years continue to improve access to reproductive health services, including targeting adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in order to address pregnancies and risky behaviour; Up-scale existing campaigns and programmes on new HIV infections amongst youth, women and persons with disabilities and develop targeted programme on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights, including gender mainstreaming, youth and disability issues in programmes, and addressing teenage pregnancies and risky behaviours.

South Africa will strive to further reduce Child and Maternal Mortality and to improve access to reproductive health services and Anti-retroviral treatment. The country is currently piloting the National Health Insurance in order to enhance universal access to quality health care; and to bridge the quality gaps that exist in the private and public sectors. South Africa has also embraced the importance of extending free dignity packs (or sanitary towels) to poor women and girls with a view to improve women's reproductive health and contribute to the retention of girl children in schools who often miss school during their cycle. We are confident that these interventions will ensure that we continue to place people at the center of our developmental agenda.

In conclusion I would like to thank the entire organizers and sponsors of the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 in particular the host Government of the Republic of Kenya, The Danish Government and the United Nations Population Fund

I thank you all