

African Ministers Convene in Addis to Discuss Population, Development Beyond 2014

Addis Ababa, 04 October 2013 (ECA) – Ministers from across Africa have convened in Addis Ababa to revisit the International Conference on Population and Development agenda and agree a new action plan for the Continent beyond 2014.

The two day Ministerial Segment of the African Regional Conference on Population and Development opened today after close to two weeks of discussions and debates on best practices in pre-events by Youth CSOs and experts. The opening was graced by key African leaders, including Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, Executive Secretary of ECA, Mr. Carlos Lopes, Executive Director of UNFPA, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin and Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Erastus Mwencha.

Opening the Ministerial Segment, Hailemariam Desalegn said that the theme of the conference, *Harnessing the Demographic Dividend: The Future we want for Africa* is timely and relevant as it is consistent with the global processes to agree on a Post-2015 Development Agenda.

“The outcome statement of the African Regional Consultations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda identified the realization of Africa's demographic dividend among other outstanding issues,” he told the convened ministers and dignitaries. “It highlighted the importance of realizing Africa's demographic dividend through such measures as strengthening their entrepreneurial capacity and knowledge base of the youth, increasing their access to finance, and eradicating early marriage and human trafficking,” the Premier added.

For his part, Mr Lopes emphasized the importance of involving the youth in decision-making and called for better strategies and more planning to avoid a possible collision course between the continent's youth and their leaders.

“If the youth does not participate in the decision making processes they will find a way of saving their dignity, may be through causes we may dislike. Africa's population dynamics have to be a dividend,” stressed Lopes. He also stated that Africa should make sure it enters a new social contract with the rest of the world taking into account its youthful demography and emerging economic situation as opposed to an

aging world faced with economic woes.

The Executive Secretary of the ECA also stated that Africa's efforts and achievements in relation to the MDGs deserved due recognition and that the way MDGs were measured did not give enough attention to the effort level.

"Reducing poverty in Paraguay by half is not the same as in Niger. It is a statistical over-stretch to do these comparisons about who meets or not universal targets," he explained. "Measured by effort, out of the 20 best MDG performers, 15 are African. This includes gains in education, maternal health or child mortality. It is significant. Even though Africa starts from a low end, one should reward the effort of those that have run the race without the healthy three meals a day, barefooted."

Weighing in on the theme, Dr. Osotimehin, stated that the African Regional Conference on Population and Development is a good opportunity to revisit the ICPD, a vision born in this very continent 19 years ago a vision that put "people at the centre of development as a means to realize the well-being and dignity of every individual; to ensure sustained economic growth and to enable harmony between man and nature."

"Today, you have the opportunity to revisit the ICPD agenda, its successes and gaps, barriers and lessons learned, to agree to a new action plan for the continent," he told the convening ministers. "At the same time, you will be contributing to a global vision of development as we reach the deadline of the Millennium Development Goals and decide on a development agenda beyond 2015."

The conference will conclude on Friday, 4 October with the adoption of a shared forward looking plan that will enable the continent to accelerate progress towards the ICPD.

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