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**Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4)
Statement of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) at the General Debate
29 May, 2024**

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of UNFPA, let me start by expressing our heartfelt condolences to the government of Papua New Guinea and the people affected by the devastating landslide in Yambali village, Enga Province earlier this week. We stand in solidarity during this challenging time and pledge our support to the ongoing response.

Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of UNFPA, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, who participated in this conference earlier this week, was unable to be here today. As the Regional Director for the Asia and the Pacific region it is an honor to speak on her behalf for UNFPA.

Reaching a global population of 8 billion and approximately 65 million in SIDS is undeniably a marker of success, reflecting advancements in health, education, and human rights. It stands as a testament to human progress, ingenuity, and perseverance.

Yet, amidst these achievements, we must acknowledge the stark reality that progress is not uniformly distributed. While we celebrate these milestones, it's imperative to recognize that equal rights and opportunities remain elusive for many.

UNFPA's 2024 State of World Population report illuminates these enduring inequalities, underscoring that without reaching those furthest behind, the Sustainable Development Goals will remain beyond our grasp. The message is unmistakable: efforts to address inequalities must persist. We cannot afford to leave anyone behind — be it young people, women and girls, persons with disabilities, or those residing in the most isolated outer islands.

Considering that many SIDS have more than 50% of their population below 25 years of age, they indeed hold enormous potential to unlock the demographic and gender dividend and to serve as the driving force behind their countries' development. Commendable progress in these areas has been made, including in advancing gender parity, education, and increased participation of women in decision-making roles.

However, this agenda is far from complete; challenges persist. The five regional review meetings of the outcomes of the International Conference on Population and Development, noted that brain

drain, population ageing, climate change, high adolescent pregnancy rates, maternal deaths, youth unemployment, crime, and gender-based violence remains obstacles to sustainable development in SIDS.

Excellencies,

UNFPA welcomes the adoption of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for Small Island Developing States as a pivotal framework delineating a clear pathway to address these persistent challenges. Committed to action, UNFPA stands ready to support Small Island Developing States in translating the ABAS into tangible progress and transformative initiatives.

Central to UNFPA's approach is the strategic leverage of population dynamics through data-driven and evidence-based policy interventions. By harnessing the power of robust data, UNFPA supports governments in identifying strategic investments in key sectors such as healthcare, education, employment, and social protection systems. In doing so, UNFPA recognizes the indispensable role of women and youth in driving economic development and resilience building, and thus, advocates for prioritization of their empowerment to catalyze sustainable development.

In SIDS with ageing populations, we need to embrace a comprehensive lifecycle approach. This involves investing in lifelong learning and skills development, ensuring their continued involvement in the workforce. Encouraging healthy, independent living is equally vital. As part of these efforts, enhancing and integrating health systems is paramount, ensuring access to essential health services at all life stages.

Equally vital is enhancing the capacity of policymakers and stakeholders to integrate the invaluable contributions of civil society, academia, and the private sector. By aligning population data with policy formulation, we can proactively address demographic shifts, such as population ageing or out-migration, which pose significant developmental challenges and risk the depletion of critical skill sets.

Furthermore, in the face of escalating climate change-induced natural hazards, it is imperative that humanitarian assistance be delivered swiftly and efficiently to communities most susceptible to adverse effects. The application of geo-referenced population data analysis is an effective tool to inform both preparedness and response efforts.

In addition to building community resilience through development programmes, it is furthermore crucial to emphasize the necessity of integrating principles of remoteness and gender equity into climate governance and financing mechanisms. This entails ensuring that strategies and allocated resources not only address the challenges posed by climate change but also reflect the unique vulnerabilities faced by women and girls.

In addressing these demographic shifts as well as the impacts of climate change, ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health, addressing gender-based violence, and facilitating family planning are critical. These services not only empower women and girls to make informed choices about their reproductive health but also contribute to broader societal resilience and development.

Recognizing this, UNFPA stands ready to continue supporting the design and implementation of comprehensive programs on these issues into broader development strategies.

Excellencies,

In designing our programmes, we believe it is imperative that we uphold the principle of “Leaving no one behind”, ensuring that no individual or community is overlooked or marginalized. We must reject geographic distance, cultural barriers, higher costs, and other challenges as excuses for inaction and instead prioritize innovative approaches to ensure equitable access to essential services and opportunities for all.

In closing, let us seize this moment to reaffirm our collective commitment to the well-being and resilience of Small Island Developing States. Together, let us embark on a journey of partnership, innovation, and solidarity, guided by the principles of inclusivity and sustainable development.

Thank you.