Statement by Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, UNFPA Executive Director

Annual high-level panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming:
“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and human rights, with an emphasis on the right to development”

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Human Rights Council, Excellencies, Madam Deputy High Commissioner, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be part of this panel discussion on human rights mainstreaming, as we celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Human Rights Council and as we begin implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The 2030 Agenda is a historic landmark for humanity both for its ambitious content and for the participatory and inclusive process that led to its adoption.

This ambition and inclusiveness is epitomized by the new agenda’s recognition of women, girls and young people as full-fledged rights-holders in whom we need to invest for their own wellbeing and for the prosperity of our nations. This reaffirms the recognition in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development that human beings must be at the centre of
sustainable development. In fact, the 2030 Agenda reinforces many of the ICPD’s core components and actions.

We particularly welcome the comprehensive approach to ending gender inequality and empowering women. This includes targets to address discrimination and violence against women and girls, halt economic and social inequalities, increase their participation, and ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

We are also particularly pleased the international system recognizes robust data as a basis for information generation and analysis, which is a precondition for sound planning, implementation and monitoring. UNFPA is the fifth longest provider of development data in the world through our work on censuses, surveys and statistical capacity development.

This comprehensiveness distinguishes the Sustainable Development Goals from the MDGs.

Another fundamental difference is the recognition that development and human rights need to go hand-in-hand if we want a world where women, girls and young people can realize their full potential.

We currently have the largest generation of young people the world has ever seen. To realize the ambitious 2030 Agenda, we must invest in them – in their health, education, empowerment and employment. With the right investments, particularly in adolescent girls, countries can harness a demographic dividend – a boost in economic growth that occurs when fertility declines and countries have a larger number of people in working age than dependents.
UNFPA will continue to stand by the world’s young people, particularly the most marginalized adolescent girls, so that they can exercise their human rights, realize their potential and contribute to their countries’ development.

We will continue to promote their access to youth-friendly services and information, to education and skills development opportunities, and to ensure that they have a voice in decisions affecting them.

Meeting the commitments made by Member States in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development will ensure that developing countries have the policy space to direct resources towards the social investments needed to generate a demographic dividend.

The realization of the right to development is a critical tool to secure that policy space. It calls on States to formulate appropriate national development policies to improve the well-being of their populations and of all individuals, ensuring their right to participate meaningfully in and benefit fairly from development.

Distinguished members of the Human Rights Council,

Over the past 10 years, the Council has played a groundbreaking role in bridging the human rights and development divide. As a result, development challenges, such as maternal mortality and morbidity, female genital mutilation, and child marriage, are today also understood as human rights issues; and government’s efforts to address them understood as enforceable obligations rather than policy options.
This pioneering rights-based vision laid the groundwork for the 2030 Agenda’s aim of realizing the human rights of all and achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights illustrate the shift the SDGs bring about. The SDGs underscore that just ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, as called for under SDG 3, will not be enough unless women and girls are can make informed decisions about their own health and wellbeing free from discrimination, coercion and violence, as elaborated under SDG 5.

Mr. President,

The Human Rights Council is uniquely placed to ensure that human rights and development go hand-in-hand through the 2030 Agenda. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) will undoubtedly play a key role in guiding states on that journey.

We at UNFPA remain committed to supporting the Human Rights Council in discharging its accountability role, while we continue to support national implementation of UPR recommendations pertaining to the ICPD agenda. We believe this work will contribute to making the SDGs and the right to development tangible realities in the lives of all women, men, girls and boys.

Thank you.