

Statement

Executive Board of UNFPA

Interactive Dialogue on Demographic Resilience

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Statement delivered by Mr. Filip De Maesschalck, Minister Counsellor, Mission of Belgium

Mister President, Excellencies, distinguished colleagues,

It is a pleasure to participate in this dialogue today on a topic close to Belgium's heart. Demographic resilience in a world of 8 billion, as we have learned from the exchanges here today and the 2023 edition of the State of the World Population Report, is about the ability of populations to adapt, respond and recover from challenges and shocks. It is about well-being, strong healthcare systems and investing in education. About social cohesion and inclusiveness, equality, empowerment, chances and opportunities.

But first and foremost, it is about rights. Upholding the basic right of every individual to decide freely on the number, spacing and timing of their children, is essential, especially for women. Moreover, these choices need to be able to be made free from discrimination, coercion and violence. Few issues are more central and crosscutting to the achievement of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. This is also why sexual and reproductive rights are a priority of the Belgian Development Cooperation, as an integral part of our health and gender strategy, and are central to our partnerships with organisations such as UNFPA, UNAIDS, WHO or GFATM.

Mister President,

To conclude, I would like to reiterate the words our Minister for Development Cooperation said on the occasion of the SWOP 2023 launch in Brussels last April: "at a time of growing polarization around gender and sexual and reproductive health and rights around the world, we need to continue to speak up and advocate a strong human rights message and foster

partnerships and collaboration with all actors around the table". You can count on Belgium to continue playing this role.

I thank you.