

**Statement by His Excellency Secretary General of SAARC,  
Ambassador Mr. Md. Golam Sarwar, at the fifty-eighth session  
of the United Nations Commission on Population and  
Development**

**7-11 April 2025, New York**

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**Madam Chairperson,**

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) consisting of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, is deeply committed to advancing the well-being of its people, and today, we gather to discuss the critical intersection of population dynamics, development, and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The importance of this forum cannot be overstated, as we work collectively towards achieving a future that guarantees well-being, equity, and dignity for every individual, regardless of age, gender, or background.

At the **regional level**, SAARC has been at the forefront of facilitating dialogue and cooperation among its Member States on population and development issues. To that end, SAARC has focused on regional policy dialogues, capacity building, and collaboration in the areas of health, education, and gender equality as well as disaster resilience. We will continue to strengthen these initiatives and encourage cross-border cooperation to address challenges like migration, urbanization, and youth unemployment.

SAARC Member States have been working together to enhance access to quality healthcare, improve education, and reduce gender-based inequalities. We recognize the need for region-specific solutions, especially as we deal with rapid urbanization, youth unemployment, and climate-induced migration. Our commitment to regional cooperation remains steadfast, and we will continue to strengthen our partnerships in order to build more resilient societies that can better meet the needs of our population.

In South Asia, we have made notable strides in improving health outcomes, particularly in areas like maternal and child health, immunization, combating infectious diseases, and expanding access to healthcare. However, challenges persist in achieving universal health coverage, improving access to quality healthcare, and addressing non-communicable diseases that are on the rise. We must also acknowledge that well-being extends beyond the absence of disease; it includes mental, emotional, and social health.

Ensuring healthy lives for all requires a multi-dimensional approach that focuses on education, empowerment, and access to quality healthcare services. Promoting well-being for all at all ages means recognizing the interconnectedness of health, education, and social inclusion. We must ensure that our health systems are not only focused on treating illness but also on promoting preventive measures, health education, and nutrition. Access to clean water, sanitation, and housing must also be prioritized to ensure a healthy environment for everyone.

In South Asia, we need to continue to invest in sexual and reproductive health services, ensuring that every woman and girl has access to family planning and maternal healthcare. We must also invest in youth health, providing them with the education, skills, and

services necessary to make informed choices about their health and well-being. As such, we must equally create inclusive systems that meet the needs of the aging population while promoting active and healthy aging.

Ultimately, a healthy population is a productive and prosperous one. Ensuring universal access to healthcare, safe drinking water, nutrition, sanitation, and education for all ages remains a cornerstone of the global developmental priorities. We must not only focus on addressing the immediate health challenges but also take a holistic approach to well-being that integrates physical, mental, and social health across the entire life cycle.

**Madam Chairperson, Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

As we move forward into the coming decades, it is imperative that we not only assess the progress we have made but also redouble our efforts to ensure the Programme's full realization.

Let us ensure that the vision of the ICPD - of a world where human rights and dignity are upheld, and where individuals are empowered to reach their full potential - becomes a reality for all.

Let us forge a future where no one is left behind, where health and hope transcend borders. As SAARC, we reaffirm our commitment to this vision.

Thank you.