Pakistan’s burgeoning population is a

PR (ZERO DRAFT)

Lahore (PR): Chairman Planning and Development Department (P&DD) Mr Habib ur Rehman Gilani has termed child marriage a crime and linked it to Pakistan’s burgeoning population making it the Fifth largest populated country. He was of the view that the high population growth rate is unsustainable leading to scarcity of employment opportunities, health and education facilities. He was speaking at the World population Day observed each year by the international community raising awareness around population-related concerns particularly the importance of family planning, maternal health and its consequential impact on governance and human development indicators. This Year Population Welfare Department, Punjab, Punjab Population Innovation Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, Pakistan organized a multi-sectoral event at a local hotel to highlight the theme for 2019 *“25 Years of the ICPD: Accelerating the Promise.”*

Mapping the milestones and persisting challenges of Punjab’s population, Secretary Population Welfare Department, Punjab Mr Muhammad Hasan Iqbal said that Pakistan was one of the pioneer countries integrating family planning services into its health services since 1960s. However, owing to stagnated level of modern contraceptive prevalence, high unmet need and poor quality of care Pakistan, Pakistan’s population is set to double in 30 years. UNFPA Technical Specialist, Mr Shoaib Ahmed provided an overview of this year’s theme spotlighting the unfinished agenda of the International Conference for Population Development and its 25th anniversary to be held in Nairobi in November 2019.

Dr Yasmeen Qazi of Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation moderated a panel discussion on the challenges of the population sector and the way forward to accelerate the ICPD agenda reiterating the importance of commitments made by governments on international platforms lamenting that lack of accountability, monitoring and subsequent analysis are the areas requiring immediate attention. Initiating the panel discussion Population Council, Pakistan Country Director Dr Zeba Sathar S(I) noted the declining maternal and infant mortality rates, improved antenatal visits noting skilled birth attendance in the last 10 years has gone from 41% to 75%. Dr. Saman Yazdani, while responding to Dr. Yasmeen's question that NGOs do have ground successes yet not translating to change, emphasized improving access to population clinics from the main to remote areas while maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of clients. Prof Dr. Muhammad Nizamuddin was positive that if provided skilled education, Pakistan’s youth population at 60% can and will make a huge difference to the overall development indicators.

Chief Executive Officer, Punjab Population Innovation Fund Mr Jawad Ahmed Qureshi stressed the need for innovative solutions for service delivery and information diffusion especially youth as agents of change to fulfil ICPD25 promise. PPIF Youth Ambassador Ms Amna Ilyas advocated women empowerment and demystifying family planning as a female domain supporting couple communication at the forefront of narrative. Executive Director Ajoka, Mr Shahid Nadeem recounted introducing family planning mentions into PTV’s narrative in a nuanced manner particularly in his iconic Janjalpura reiterating that ICPD Agenda can be amplified through Pakistan’s edutainment media. Director Mr Sarmad Khoosat exhorted involving the artist fraternity to bring about a revolution to curb the existing prejudice and myopia around family planning narrative. He commended the Short Films screened during the event proposing using big screen for mass social impact education. Three short films on male responsibility in Family Planning, importance of maternal and child health and Family Planning is the key to reduce poverty, were also screened at the event. The team of Iqra University, Islamabad was adjudged the first prize winner by the Jury and the creative winners were awarded prizes and certificates by the Chief Guest.