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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

REMARKS AT THE UN POPULATION AWARD CEREMONY

1 June 2009

Mr. Chairman,
Madame Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA,
Members of the Committee for the United Nations Population Award,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to this important ceremony.

I thank the inter-governmental Committee for the United Nations Population Award whose members are here this evening.

You all know that population issues are not about numbers – they are about people. When we speak of maternal mortality, we are not just talking about statistics, we are dealing with tragic deaths. And when we urge action, we are not trying to reduce population growth, we are trying to help individuals to exercise their rights.

The winners we recognize this evening understand the importance of this struggle. And they have devoted themselves to advancing the cause.

Please join me in a warm round of applause for our two winners: Dr. Mahmoud Fahmy Fathalla, a Professor from Assiut University in Egypt, and the Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense of Nicaragua.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dr. Fathalla has made a major impact in the field of family planning, reproductive rights and ending maternal deaths. He helped to found the “Safe Motherhood Initiative”, which is saving women from dying in pregnancy and childbirth.

People around the world respect Dr. Fathalla’s expertise and advocacy. Many international organizations rely on his advice. He has worked with UNDP, UNFPA, WHO and the World Bank as they help developing countries. I especially applaud his recognition of the important role of women in contraceptive research.

Dr. Fathalla is influencing national and global population strategies. And he founded one of the first family planning organizations in the Arab world: the Egyptian Fertility Care society, set up in 1974. To this day, he remains a valued advisor to the Egyptian Family Planning Association, the Ministry of Health and the National Population Council.

Dr. Fathalla combines a solid medical background with an ability to communicate. His video “Why did Mrs. X die?” has raised awareness throughout the world.

Dr. Fathalla has shown how science, academics and advocacy can come together to help the women of the world. He richly deserves the UN Population Award.

Mr. Chairman,

It is also my pleasure to congratulate our second laureate: the Movimiento Comunal Nicaragüense of Nicaragua, a non-governmental organization bringing together communities to improve life for the country’s people. The MCN focuses on development, gender equality and environmental protection. It has trained people in more than 2,000 communities, and has mobilized an impressive 20,000 people, including leaders, educators and midwives, to improve public health.

Through these efforts, the MCN has contributed to major successes, including increases in literacy, the eradication of polio and the reduction of maternal and child mortality rates. It has also improved conditions for Nicaraguans by focusing on youth, gender relations, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancies.

With strong partnerships from the government, non-governmental groups and international organizations, the MCN is expanding its good work to empower individuals and help communities claim their right to health. For these reasons and more, the MCN has earned tonight’s recognition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Excellencies,

Let us give another round of applause to our two very distinguished and deserving laureates.

As we strive to uphold the ideals of the United Nations Charter, we can take inspiration from their outstanding work. Let us build a world where women do not die needlessly in childbirth; where girls get the education they deserve; where young people are protected from HIV; and where couples can decide how many children to have.

Seeing these winners tonight, I am all the more determined to do my part to address population and reproductive health. All of us – governments, civil society groups and international institutions – must work together to put these issues at the heart of the development agenda.

On behalf of the United Nations, I congratulate the winners for their achievements and wish them all the best as they continue their invaluable work for the wellbeing and progress of the world’s people.

Thank you very much.