

Development is Like a Marathon that Ethiopia Can Win, Says UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador



UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador for Japan, Yuko Arimori, speaks at St. Mary's Hospital, Axum, Ethiopia.

Credit: Hiroyuki Yamada/JOICFP.

AXUM, Ethiopia, March 2006 — UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador in Japan, Yuko Arimori, undertook a mission to Ethiopia to see how the Fund supports reproductive health in one of the most populous countries in Africa. Her mission started with the opening of a maternity facility in St. Mary's Axum Hospital in one of the most historic cities in the world.

Gathered at the hospital with Ms. Arimori in Axum—which some believe is host city to the Ark of the Covenant—were the wife of the country's Prime Minister, Ms. Azeb Mesfin; the President of

Tigray Region, Tsegay Berhe; and the nation's Minister of Health, Dr. Tewdros Adhanom. Others included the deputy Speaker of the House, Ms. Shitaye Menale, and diplomats from the European Commission and countries, such as France, Norway and Ireland.

All of them were invited to the opening of a new maternity ward in a hospital that is supported by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, in partnership with the Tigray Health Bureau and Medicines du Monde, especially in the training of health workers.

"I am deeply impressed to see so many leaders here today," said Ms. Arimori. "Your strong commitment gives me confidence that we can win our fight in the future," she said to reports of the city's reproductive health challenges.

"It will be a long fight, but I am a marathon runner and ready," Ms. Arimori said. "I am ready to join you in this race. Development is not longer than a marathon race and, as we all know, Ethiopians are masters at winning the marathon."

St. Mary's Axum Hospital handles about 800 clients a month, according to hospital officials. These numbers include 60 to 70 deliveries, with 12 to 15 of them performed by Caesarean section. Support for the hospital includes the training of doctors in surgical obstetric emergencies. Due to the flight of health staff from the region, the support programme in the hospital trains mid-level health professionals (health officers and nurses) to provide emergency obstetric care. Currently, only 6 per cent of births take place in health facilities, with 58 per cent handled by unskilled relatives and 26 per cent by untrained traditional birth attendants.



Ms. Arimori and students take part in a run at Addis Ababa University.

Credit: Hiroyuki Yamada/JOICFP.

Apart from taking part in the opening of the maternal ward, Ms. Arimori engaged in several activities related to the work of UNFPA in Ethiopia during her week-long mission to the country. She took part in the 'Access for Success' mini-run at Addis Ababa University to promote youth-friendly reproductive health services. She ran alongside UNFPA Honorary Ambassador in Ethiopia, Olympic gold medallist, Meseret Defar, and hundreds of students. The event was well attended by students and members of the diplomatic community, including Japan's Ambassador to Ethiopia and the UNFPA Representative in that nation, Monique Rakotomalala. They congratulated and handed prizes to winners.



Ms. Arimori greets a fistula patient in Addis Ababa.
Credit: Hiroyuki Yamada/JOICFP.

Other parts of Ms. Arimori's mission included visits to projects for youth, for women and for female students. Much of her mission was about interacting with women, with young people and with those who had experienced or escaped female genital mutilation/cutting. She sat to listen, to learn and to ask them about any messages they wanted her to relay to her Japanese audiences.

"I learn as a Goodwill Ambassador and take it as a big duty to share messages of hope and of what should be done to deal with the challenges that people face," said Ms. Arimori about her interactions with women and young people.

"Four years into my work as Goodwill Ambassador, I love the role more than my running," said Ms. Arimori. "I can see many important things I should see and should never miss while I am alive. I see these things better as a Goodwill Ambassador than as an athlete. I can then help address and increase awareness about the challenges I come across in developing countries."