

World Population Day 2009: Observances Around the World

In **Afghanistan**, UNFPA observed World Population Day (WPD) on 12 July in coordination with the Ministry of Women Affairs and other government partners. A panel consisting of the Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs, Deputy Ministers of Health, Education, Economy and Women Affairs, two women Parliament members and a woman member of the Women Business Association addressed the issues of “Women as Economic Agents” in Afghanistan. Panelists agreed on the need for reliable data and a population strategy by the government, equal opportunities for women to participate in economic activities, and the application of family planning and birth spacing. The ceremony also featured the opening of an exhibition of women’s handicraft.

Throughout **Argentina**, several newspapers carried the WPD message to invest in women and girls and provide access to reproductive care through editorials written by UNFPA staff as well as other articles that showcased the Fund’s work in the country.

More than 500 people attended **Bhutan’s** WPD commemorating event, which featured UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador, Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, as the chief guest. The event included a statement by the Minister for Health, on behalf of the government, and another by the UN Resident Coordinator on the theme, “Investing in women is a smart choice.” School children also advocated the Day’s theme through songs and dances as well as a poster competition.

Working with the government and civil society, UNFPA in **Brazil** observed WPD through a public conversation on this year’s theme: “Responding to the economic crisis: investing in women is a smart option,” in Salvador da Bahia. The conference featured the concerns of women living outside major cities and those from minority groups. Their testimonies reflected their views on poverty, education, discrimination, gender-based violence and the financial crisis. UNFPA also produced posters and banners that were unified by a colorful motif.

Burkina Faso observed WPD on 14 July with a seminar organized by Fond Commun Genre, a UNFPA partner, on the problem of gender and results centred management. During the event, which was attended by the country’s minister in charge of budget, finance and economy and officials, the UNFPA representative shared the Day’s statement by UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid.

On 11 July, **Cambodia’s** National Committee on Population and Development, with support from UNFPA, organized a concert, traditional dance, a comedy show and a quiz in observance of WPD. The Prime Minister also requested key government institutions to work closely with development partners to address population-related issues. The message reconfirmed the government’s position to continue investing in women’s issues, especially promoting the rights to reproductive health care, social participation and development. Banners were also raised in all provincial towns to promote the Day’s message.

Youth in **Cape Verde** led a march in the port city of Mindelo, playing music and carrying UNFPA banners that emphasized WPD's message. All activities in the country, an archipelago off the coast of western Africa, were carried out in partnership with the National Institute for Gender Equality and Equity and the Municipality of São Vicente, and in collaboration with local NGOs and the Women Parliamentary Network. The Day's theme was carried throughout the national media, and UNFPA is in the process of having a formal partnership with a national network of ATMs that will display the WPD poster for one month. In addition, UNFPA and its partners sponsored a health fair and exhibition of handmade products manufactured by women.

The National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPFPC) in **China** commemorated World Population Day by organizing a publicity event under the theme of "Support Households that Accepted Family Planning and Promote Women's Entrepreneurial Development." NPFPC also launched a national initiative to emphasize the importance of income generating activities for women during the economic crisis. Women representatives from different sectors, such as rural, migrant and young people, shared their own stories during the event. The provincial governments and other bureaus also took advantage of WPD to advocate current emerging population issues in their respective provinces, such as the challenge of the imbalance sex ratio at birth. A panel discussion, featuring the UNFPA representative and two other guests, was broadcast by China Radio International.

In **Costa Rica**, UNFPA, UNDP and the National Institute of Women organized a conversation titled "Women and the Economic Crisis: Toward a New Sexual and Social Pact." Speakers stressed that even in times of financial instability, investment should continue in women and girls, particularly in their reproductive health. Representatives from different women's and social organizations addressed the topic, saying that women alone should not shoulder the burden of reproductive health and care. A woman from the countryside explained the struggles of daily life and living off the land, adding that women's life is one of constant turmoil. The ceremony also honoured the founder and president of the Association of Domestic Workers, who had led the fight for a law regarding payment of domestic workers that took 17 years to pass.

Pizza lovers in the city of Chennai, **India** got a free delivery with their order – a bookmark with the World Population Day slogan: "Join the Anti-Poverty Movement, Educate Women and Girls." The partnership with Domino's Pizza allowed the Day's message to be disseminated on boxes and bikes. In other states, volunteers went door-to-door in slum areas to encourage parents to enroll their young daughters in school. UNFPA also partnered with the government, NGOs, media and educational institutions to engage in ongoing advocacy processes that focus on greater investment in health and rights of women. Though the monsoon rains delayed some activities, several states observed the Day by organizing street theaters shows, workshops of women leaders and symposia with professors and doctors.

The Day's celebration in **Iran** was held in the Rayzap International Conference Hall in the northern part of Tehran. The event, that included a UNFPA exhibition, was attended by about 400 people. In his speech during the event, the Minister of Health and Medical Education emphasized Iran's commitment to the ICPD Plan of Action and the MDGs. The Deputy Health Minister spoke highly about UNFPA's activities in the country, saying that the government will

continue its efforts to promote family planning, while paying more attention to the female-headed households. During a panel discussion chaired by a professor of demography at Tehran University, the head of the Iranian delegation at the 1994 ICPD gave a very lively talk on the needs of sexual information and education for the adolescents and youth.

During the week of 6 July, United Nations agencies in **Kosovo** partnered with local officials to hold a series of roundtable discussions to mark the Day's theme. The issues affecting the country's women were addressed by representatives of the civil society, minority groups and international organizations. Artpolis, an NGO, presented a part of a play called "Kitchen of Victims," a UNFPA-funded theatre piece highlighting the difficulties of living with gender-based violence. UNFPA also organized a special event with Serbian, Roma and Gorani women and political activists to discuss their particular situations and explore the potentials for improvement.

Approximately 150 participants from the government, embassies, the United Nations, NGOs, and the media attended a meeting on the theme "Meeting MDG through Universal Access to Reproductive Health: Investing in Women is a Smart Choice" in **Lao People's Democratic Republic** on 17 July. The meeting, chaired by Minister of Planning and Investment, Vice Minister of Health and the UNFPA representative, addressed the linkage between the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Keynote speakers shared stories to reflect local perspectives on community health promotion, young people, family planning and the experiences of a midwife.

UNFPA in **Mexico** held a press conference on 10 July to highlight the message that investing in women during tough economic times is a wise choice. The federal government held an observance on 13 July that was chaired by the Undersecretary of Migration, Population and Religious Affairs.

In **Moldova**, UNFPA organized a field trip for 10 journalists from national media to Drochia to report on two model-centres that are providing medical and social assistance for victims of violence and human trafficking. This was followed with a press conference by representatives from Ministry of Economy, National Statistic Bureau and UNFPA. The concept of National Strategy for Demographic Security and the first set of maps titled "Republic of Moldova. Demographic Situation, 2008" were presented during the conference. A photo exhibition focusing on marginalized populations in the context of the economic crisis, ICPD Principles and MDG was inaugurated in the Moldova Press House.

UNFPA in **Mongolia**, observed the Day by sponsoring a half-day seminar focusing on the theme of "Responding to the Economic Crisis: Investing in Women is a Smart Choice." There were four other presentations on the topic, including "Improving Maternal Health in the context of the National Reproductive Health Programme and National MDGs" and "NGO Perspectives: The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Women's Health and Family Welfare."

In **Myanmar**, the World Population Day was observed through nationwide campaign of posters, essays, articles and color photo competitions in which 5,500 contestants from all 17 states and divisions participated. The prize distribution for the 30 winners was also held at the commemorative ceremony. In addition, UNFPA also partnered with the Ministry of Immigration

and Population (MOIP) in Nay Pyi Taw to commemorate the Day. In his opening statement, the MOIP minister stressed the impact of the global economic crisis on marginalized populations. The UNFPA representative in Myanmar talked, in his opening remarks, about the country's goals to reduce maternal and infant mortality, fill the unmet need for child spacing and reduce HIV prevalence rate especially among high-risk groups.

UNFPA in **Nepal** observed the Day with a walkathon from Sadak Bibhaag to Jawalakhel Ground in Kathmandu. The event featured remarks by UNFPA and NGO representatives, an open marketplace, prizes for the winners of the walkathon and a blood drive set up by the Nepal Red Cross Society. UNFPA also produced media articles, posters and factsheets highlighting this year's theme as well as vital statistical information about the country.

The Day was observed in the **Occupied Palestinian Territory** during a national meeting organized by the Palestinian Ministry of Planning, in cooperation with UNFPA, entitled "The Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development: Investing in Woman as Smart Choice." The Minister of Labour gave a statement underlining the importance of increasing women's participation in the labor market. The Ministry of Planning's statement highlighted the importance of the Qatar Declaration in raising population needs as national and regional priority. The meeting was attended by more than 80 representatives of different ministries, NGOs, universities and research organizations.

The Population Center and the Grand People's Study House (GPSH) in the **Democratic People's Republic of North Korea** observed WPD by organizing a national workshop that was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Education and a number of social organizations. Presentations were made by representatives of the Academy of Social Science, the Korean Family Planning Association and GPSH on subjects such as economic development and family planning, gender equity and enhancing women's empowerment. UNFPA addressed the workshop by presenting the Day's statement by UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Ahmed Obaid. Several articles were published in various national newspapers—based on the information provided by UNFPA—on the health and rights of women and girls.

Under the theme of investing in women's health and education, UNFPA in **Sri Lanka** highlighted the remarkable progress made by the country in achieving universal access to primary education and healthcare—even prior to achieving high levels of economic development. Messages of the Day stressed the need to view the global economic crisis as an opportunity for Sri Lanka, not only to safeguard the gains made in the last decade, but to also invest in systems that are more cost-effective. A unique partnership with the largest mobile service provider, Dialog GSM, helped disseminate SMS educational messages, like the one saying: "When you empower a woman you empower a family! Invest in the health and education of girls!! Message by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, Sri Lanka."

Coinciding with the observance of World Population Day, UNFPA in **Thailand** convened the first-ever National Reproductive Health Conference from 15 to 17 July at the Rama Gardens Hotel in Bangkok. Presentations covered contraception technology, reproductive health education, adolescent concerns, unplanned pregnancy and reproductive rights. A half-day presentation on 16 July also featured remarks by the UNFPA Representative and a panel

discussion by NGO leaders.

The Vice Prime Minister of **Timor-Leste**, the Secretary of State for Promotion of Equality and the Minister of Economy and Development attended a World Population Day event that included speeches, songs, dance and a women's handicraft fair from a local NGO. The event coincided with the launch, by the government, of a pilot for 2010 Census in 42 areas throughout the country, with the assistance of UNFPA and other development partners.

In **Tunisia**, the theme for World Population Day was adapted to the national level to read: “Despite the Crisis, Persevere to Realize the ICPD Goals.” A study day at the National Family and Population Board Headquarters was held on 10 July to discuss what the financial crisis means to reproductive health services in the country and the actions needed to secure the progress that has already been achieved. Professors, officials and the UNFPA representative took an in-depth look at Tunisia’s situation regarding the labour market for women, microcredit and past achievements.

Viet Nam’s UNFPA Representative spoke at a press conference on the theme of “Responding to the Economic Crisis: Investing in Women is a Smart Choice” by emphasizing that it is often women and girls who suffer disproportionately during times of crisis. The press conference also featured presentations on the implementation of population and family planning in the first six months, an action plan for the next six months of 2009, as well as the presentation of the National Award Ceremony for local outstanding population and family planning workers.

--By Rohina Phadnis