

UNITED NATIONS



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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON WORLD POPULATION DAY**

**11 July 2012**

The world's population has more than tripled since the United Nations was created in 1945, and keeps growing. With more than 7 billion people now inhabiting the planet, we face ever greater demands on shared resources and significant challenges to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals.

Multiple crises – food, fuel and financial – have caused significant suffering and served as a wake-up call about the need to pay far more attention to the building blocks of sustainable development. Reproductive health is an indispensable part of the sustainable development equation. Women and young people who are in good health, and who have the power and means to make their own decisions about how many children to have -- and when to have them -- are better able to contribute to the development of their societies.

Yet only one in three rural women in developing countries receives adequate care during pregnancy. Teenage pregnancies are still commonplace in most parts of the world, often driven by poverty and a lack of education. More than 200 million women and adolescent girls have no access to contraceptives. And voluntary family planning programmes are starved for resources almost everywhere.

We can – and must – do better. On this World Population Day, I call for urgent concerted action by Member States to bridge the gap between demand and supply for reproductive health care. Reproductive health and rights are integral to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Investing in universal access to reproductive health is a crucial investment in healthy societies and a more sustainable future.