

World Population Day 2009: Observances Around the World

In **Afghanistan**, UNFPA observed World Population Day 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.

Public meetings, debates, rallies, fairs, film shows and folk songs highlighted the message of World Population Day in **Bangladesh**. The Department of Population Sciences at the University of Dhaka observed the day by organizing a rally, discussion meeting, debate competition and an essay competition on this year’s theme. The UNFPA Representative reminded the students of their special role in bringing about societal changes, like family planning, violence against women, early marriage, dowry and maternal health. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporter’s Association (BGMEA) observed the day in Dhaka and Chittagong with active participation by garment workers. Media widely covered the national activities and one magazine carried an exclusive interview with the UNFPA Representative. The country’s prime minister issued a statement on the Day.

For ten days in early July, the **Benin** UNFPA office coordinated a variety of activities to commemorate World Population Day. The Association of Women Lawyers of Benin and other NGOs organized roundtable discussions about women’s empowerment. The official events took place in Zagnanado with speeches from local leaders and an award ceremony to recognize outstanding girls. Booklets containing information on the Day were distributed. Radio contests, sports games and cultural activities also highlighted the message.

More than five hundred 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 World Population Day (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.

The Day was observed in **Burundi** with the support of the Ministry of Human Rights and Gender and the One UN Group. The media were sensitized on the issues at a special workshop before reporting throughout the week on various activities including a "cultural evening" hosted by Miss Burundi, a seminar on financing credit to women, conferences, debates, testimonies of women who have income-generating activities and more. The message from the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the UNFPA Executive Director were widely disseminated.

On 11 July, **Cambodia's** National Committee on Population and Development, with support from UNFPA, organized a concert, traditional dance, comedy show and 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 to emphasize 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 will have 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 in women and girls—particularly their reproductive health—should continue. 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. At the ceremony, the founder and president of the Association of Domestic Workers was honoured with a standing ovation. She had led the fight for a law regarding payment of domestic workers that took 17 years to pass.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** the Day was observed with the support of all provincial ministries. For the occasion, T-shirts, banners and hats were produced and sent to all regions. In the capital, the Day's event was attended by high-level government officials along with the international community, NGOs, women's and young people's groups as well as financial institutions. Among the many activities there was an exhibition of women's handicraft, discussion groups among women's NGOs, workshop on family planning methods and a theater play. A special research project on women as economic agents was launched by the Ministry of Development, and the minister of development gave a special interview on television. The Day’s theme was well covered in the press and on radio. In other provinces, advocacy activities were held with local elected officials.

On 12 July, the **Egypt** country office along with government partners held a seminar to discuss the economic crisis and its relation to other social factors, such as food security, education, health and population. The seminar was held at the premises of the newly established Ministry of State For Family and Population and was attended by about 150 invitees from the various stakeholder groups. Speakers explored in-depth how each of these issues affect everyday Egyptians and possible solutions, such as the Education of Girls Initiative to make going to school easier for female students. Dr. Mahmoud Fathallah, the Egyptian professor who was named a 2009 United Nations Population Award laureate, was honoured. National media covered the issues and themes of the Day.

In **Eritrea**, UNFPA partnered with the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW). Various government and UNFPA officials spoke at a seminar that highlighted the effect of the financial crisis on the labour market and women and girls. Some participants attended a training workshop on “Social dialogue: All partners for decent work.” The events were covered by the local government media.

The observance for World Population Day began on 10 July in **Ethiopia**. About 400 people attended a half-day symposium to mark the event, which coincided with the 16th anniversary of the start of the National Population Policy of Ethiopia. A national theme was also chosen for this year: “Small, Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous Family through the Implementation of the National Population Policy.” The symposium featured speakers from UN agencies, the government and academia. There were also some artistic presentations, such as a poem recital, a dramatic scene about family planning and a song. A three-week question and answer program is running on national television.

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 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.

The Day in the **Ivory Coast** was observed with the support of national NGO’s and partners with activities including a television debate, theater play, testimonies by high ranking women who benefited from education, exhibitions etc. To carry the message, t-shirts and banners were fabricated, public service announcement were produced and aired on nationally and regional television and radio. The national media carried reports and covered the theme of the Day.

A truck equipped with speakers and banners broadcast the message of World Population Day in parts of **Kenya** as it travelled on route to an event observing the Day. UNFPA, the National Coordinating Agency on Population & Development (NCAPD) and a radio station teamed up to sponsor the truck, which played music and WPD announcements. WPD T-shirts were awarded to those who were able to answer questions on population. At the national event, the UNFPA Deputy Representative read the message from the Executive Director. During the observances, speakers from the Kenyan government made the case for the inclusion of women in economic activities, girls to attend school as much as boys and an increase in women’s participation in the country’s development process.

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 PDR** 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.

Through the main streets of Ganta, **Liberia**, citizens and officials marched to spread the message of World Population Day: “Responding to the Economic Crisis: Investing in Women is a Smart Choice.” Members of government ministries took part in radio talk shows, and members of the public were able to call in and share views on the level of investment in women and girls in the country. High school students in Ganta, the second largest city in terms of population, participated in an essay contest in which they wrote on the topic “Importance of Investing in Women.” A government representative reaffirmed commitment to making the compulsory primary education program a success, especially for girls.

In **Madagascar**, NGOs supported activities to mark the observance of the Day with special events on reproductive health for adolescents, fistula, family planning campaigns and advocacy campaigns to end gender-based violence among others.

On 17 July, UNFPA in **Malaysia** and the Women’s Institute of Management (WIM), a women’s NGO, observed World Population Day with the launch of a three-day basic entrepreneurial course for single mothers at WIM. The effort is part of a three-year programme that aims to improve the well-being of marginalized and vulnerable women by contributing to their empowerment regarding reproductive health and protection from violence. His Royal Highness Tuanku Muhriz and his wife, Her Royal Highness Tuanku Aishah Rohani, of the Negeri Sembilan state, presided over the event. Handicrafts and other handmade items made by the single mothers and other low-income women were exhibited during the event.

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.

In **Niger**, women were the focus of the activities and participated in great number in traditional games, cultural events with artists, music, dance, comedians and theatre performances. The Day was marked with speeches from high-level officials. The ministers of health and population along with the UNFPA representative visited hospitals and gave addresses to the public. UNFPA donated equipment for reproductive health and support young people.

A public lecture on 14 July capped off a week of activities to observe World Population Day in **Nigeria**. A number of prominent government officials, including a representative of the nation's first lady, and heads of NGOs attended the event. The president of the National Council of Women Society underscored the theme that investing in women and girls is a smart choice. There was a dance performance and readings of the speeches from the United Nations Secretary-General and UNFPA Executive Director. Earlier in the week, there were community advocacy meetings to address needs of the rural population and those in charge of health budgets in smaller towns. Other activities included a press conference, radio jingles promoting the theme of WPD and school debates

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 labour 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 the Day by organizing a national workshop with the participation 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.

For the Day, young people, women and the elderly were the focus of activities in **Senegal**. To mark the observance, high level officials gave speeches at rallies and called for greater investment in reproductive health. The media reported extensively on the theme and carried the message from the United Nations Secretary-General and the UNFPA Executive Director.

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 government launch 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 Tunisia and the actions needed secure the progress that has already been achieved. Professors, officials and the UNFPA representative took an in-depth look at the country's situation regarding the labour market for women, microcredit and past achievements.

World Population Day was featured prominently throughout all major media outlets in **Turkey**. Articles on the Day's theme "Responding to the Economic Crisis: Investing in Women is a Smart Choice" was a constant throughout the coverage. About 30 different news items regarding the Day appeared in the Turkish press and the Statement by the Executive Director was widely

reprinted. A special television programme on the Day was aired as well as a radio feature that reached some 250 million households.

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 is often women and girls who suffer disproportionately during times of crisis such as this. 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.