



**Statement by  
Dr. Natalia Kanem  
Executive Director, UNFPA**

**Annual Session 2022 of the Executive Board of  
UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS**

7 June 2022  
New York

Madam President,  
Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,  
Colleagues and friends,  
I'm happy we're able to be together again 'live in 3D' – in 3 dimensions.

We at UNFPA have learned a lot over the past few years, and now with a new strategic plan under way, our agency is intent on tackling problems afresh, seeking innovative, inclusive solutions.

We come together at a pivotal moment. Covid, conflict, food insecurity, climate-related disasters – all are setting back progress, especially for women and girls. We witness women's rights being subverted; their needs neglected; and political pushback relegating them in some cases to second-class citizens.

Yet, this is no time to step back. Instead, it is time to forge ahead. That is the commitment embedded in the UNFPA strategic plan adopted by this Executive Board – to accelerate progress and keep pushing forward, whatever the challenges. This is imperative if we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

It is a commitment built upon accountability to the women and girls we serve; to Member States; to our own staff; to victims and survivors of any form of violence, harassment or abuse; and to the United Nations Charter whose principles we are all sworn to uphold.

Especially at this fraught moment in history, the value of consensus in the Executive Board is crucial to advance the ICPD Programme of Action in global fora and to provide space for UNFPA to implement its Strategic Plan, as we saw recently in the successful outcome of this year's Commission on Population and Development.

My annual report highlights the significant achievements of our previous strategic plan period.

From 2018 to 2021, UNFPA helped avert over 71 million unintended pregnancies, nearly 200,000 maternal deaths, and 22 million unsafe abortions. We procured contraceptives offering 255 million couple-years of protection.

In humanitarian-affected countries alone, we supported 12 and a half million safe deliveries.

Working in partnership, UNFPA protected some 570,000 girls from female genital mutilation, and provided over 50,000 women and girls suffering from traumatic obstetric fistula with the benefit of treatment.

On behalf of UNFPA, I thank the Board for your active engagement and partnership, which are central to these achievements and to upholding accountability.

Now, it is our intention to build upon those results. We are sharpening our normative work. As part of leaving no one behind, for example, UNFPA launched our first-ever disability inclusion strategy; we developed notable programming in support of people of African descent and indigenous peoples, and we are committed to upholding the rights of LGBTQI-plus people and marginalized groups.

Nations face competing concerns and demands on resources – whether it be the ongoing pandemic, security concerns, or support for refugees. Tragically, the spillover effects of the war in Ukraine are also hitting the most vulnerable in developing countries, exacerbating extreme hunger, poverty and inequality.

No doubt, our collective path to 2030 is steeper, which is why we need peace and international solidarity more than ever before.

Getting back on track to reach: zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths and zero gender-based violence by 2030 urgently requires adequate, sustained investments, and the commitment of Member States to prioritize long-term, predictable funding and financing for sexual and reproductive health and rights, including both targeted official development assistance and increased domestic resources.

Data and evidence consistently show that these are investments with huge returns.

Every additional dollar invested in family planning can save governments three dollars in costs for pregnancy-related and newborn care.

Over time, that same dollar invested in a total package of reproductive health, including family planning, could yield as much as one hundred and twenty dollars in health and economic benefits by helping girls stay in school and boosting women's lifetime earnings potential.

The UNFPA Supplies Partnership is an integral part of UNFPA's efforts to make the right to family planning real for everyone, everywhere.

What would UNFPA have done without the generous donors who stepped in to stem the impact of drastic funding cuts to the Supplies Partnership last year? We thank you.

Over the next two years, however, a funding gap of US\$310 million threatens UNFPA Supplies' lifesaving work.

The Supplies Partnership supports governments to increase the domestic financing that ensures long-term sustainability. This includes a new US\$30 million matching fund that will complement government funding for family planning commodities and maternal health medicines.

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

The lessons we have learned – for example, about the importance of telemedicine and digital and mobile services for expanding access to lifesaving care; about the criticality of strong data systems and statistical visibility to identify those furthest behind; about the need to tailor responses to country contexts; to invest further in resilience, preparedness and humanitarian response; and to increase our focus on financing – all of these lessons and more are reflected in our new Strategic Plan.

We remain intent on scaling up proven innovations and pivoting to improve. Here, too, accountability is key, and UNFPA is firmly committed to responsible stewardship. The new Innovation Unit in my office will contribute to this holistic effort, including on innovative financing.

Last year, UNFPA funded innovations in 25 country offices. With help from Denmark, Finland and Luxembourg, the Equalizer, our recently launched UNFPA Innovation Accelerator Fund, will soon announce funding to women-led social enterprises selected from among hundreds of proposals received through an Innovation Challenge run in collaboration with other UN entities. We are expanding and diversifying our expertise and partnerships, and investing in the next generation through our cadre of Youth Innovation Fellows and interns.

Population data underpins our work towards the three zeros. It is a priority focus area that we continue to expand upon, including through our country-level support for census, through the UNFPA population data portal and through our dashboard on intimate partner violence.

UNFPA is bringing data and evidence forward to promote dialogue on difficult questions relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights. The 2022 State of World Population report, for example, shows that nearly half of all pregnancies in the world are unintended, raising important questions about women's rights and choices or lack thereof. The research tells us that 60 percent of unintended pregnancies end up in abortion, far too often unsafe abortion, which is an often-unrecognized contributor to maternal deaths.

This is a heterogeneous world, and demographic and fertility profiles vary country to country. Therefore, UNFPA is also committed to helping countries anticipate and address demographic shifts, such as in ageing societies and those experiencing low fertility or countries with large youth populations, by building resilience to demographic change so that their people thrive as these changes unfold in coming decades.

To hold ourselves to the highest standards of transparency, accountability and oversight, UNFPA continues to reinforce zero tolerance for all forms of wrongdoing. We have deepened investments in our audit and investigation, evaluation and ethics offices, and we maintain a coordinator in my Executive Office on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

Such investments in the oversight functions are very important, as are the deliberate steps management has taken to respond to recommendations so that we remain best-in-class.

I am very pleased to report that in 2021, UNFPA achieved a 99% implementation rate for internal audit recommendations and received an unqualified opinion for 2020 from the United Nations Board of Auditors.

UNFPA anti-fraud controls, based upon the results of our 'enterprise risk management and control' self-assessment processes, were effective in 2021, relying on an improved 'second line of defence', particularly for implementing partner cash transfers and high-quality 'last-mile' delivery of programme supplies.

Our new risk-management policy issued this year emphasizes fraud prevention and detection controls, and we continue mitigating measures in response to pandemic-associated risks.

Evaluative evidence helps us deliver stronger and better for the women and girls furthest behind. UNFPA welcomes the 2021 Annual Report on evaluation and efforts to strengthen evaluation performance and utilization for decision-making, learning and enhanced accountability across the organization. I am proud of the steps we have taken to incorporate lessons from evaluations into our programmes, along with lessons from the audit and investigation and ethics functions.

Our success depends upon advancing equity and respect for diversity within UNFPA. Fostering a culture of inclusion, civility and anti-racism, a workplace where everyone can freely thrive, forms part of our internal accountability to UNFPA staff, who indeed are our greatest asset.

Everyone, including those we serve, must feel safe to speak up and have their voice heard. Our workplace should and must be free from all forms of harassment, exploitation and abuse.

We continue to support interagency work on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), deploying PSEA interagency coordinators to eleven humanitarian priority countries, including Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

Sustainable in-country resourcing of this work against sexual exploitation and abuse remains a key priority for the Fund, and we are working closely with humanitarian partners to take this collective agenda forward. In the interim and to meet the continuing need for qualified personnel, UNFPA is carrying forward one of my PSEA Championship initiatives by expanding the existing roster of interagency coordinators.

Further to our commitment to accountability, we have revamped our quality assurance processes for country programme document design, so they fully align with and are derived from the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and, where applicable, the Humanitarian Response Plans. Our work is tailored to the local context and to countries' declared priorities – whether in Small Island Developing States, least developed or middle-income countries. Three CPDs are coming before you at this session, and we do count on your support.

The Board also has before it the baselines and targets for the integrated results and resources framework for the new Strategic Plan 2022 through 2025. As always, we have endeavoured to be ambitious in our targets. As you will see, there is a strong focus on common and complementary indicators, well in keeping with expectations under UN reform.

UNFPA enthusiastically participates in reform processes at the country and regional levels with joint programmes, joint analysis, and common efforts on logistics and shared resources, because we know that the UN Development System has more impact when we bring UNFPA collaborative advantages to the table.

In the spirit of transparency and accountability essential for the Board's oversight, we came to you in March for a dedicated discussion on the enterprise resource planning system. Now, having learned valuable lessons and, after careful consideration of challenges and risks, we've adapted our approach. The destination, however, remains implementation of a robust ERP system to more effectively and efficiently deliver our life-saving programmes and our three transformative results. I have appreciated the Board's guidance, partnership and support, and I am confident that we are on the right path.

UNFPA is also a contributor to the Secretary-General's vision for "Our Common Agenda" in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, including co-leading on gender equality, on eliminating gender-based violence, and on youth engagement, all with the aim of leaving no one behind.

Madam President,

Several weeks ago, in Moldova on the border with Ukraine, I met women who had fled with just what they could carry, leaving husbands, brothers, fathers, and in one case a young child, to an uncertain fate. It was also important to me to visit a refugee centre housing Roma women.

The harrowing stories they shared illustrate just how important it is that the rights of women and girls, including their right to health, to a safe pregnancy and to live free from violence, rape and abuse, remain at the centre of the rights-based humanitarian response.

Contraception, sexual and reproductive health care, protection from sexual violence – these are not peacetime luxuries. They must be a non-negotiable part of every emergency response.

And let us not forget the countless other scenes of suffering playing out in other countries across the globe – suffering with a distinctly female face.

Recently in the Philippines, I met a community whose health facilities had been ravaged by Typhoon Rai/Odette.

In Southern Leyte, I spoke with Mariel, who was the first to give birth in a UNFPA Women's Health on Wheels mobile facility, which we deploy in hard-to-reach areas and humanitarian settings.

Mariel beamed as she showed me her healthy one-month-old. She proudly told me she named her daughter Heart Eunne Fae – Heart because she was born on Valentine's Day and Eunne Fae in honour of UNFPA.

Unfortunately, not all stories have happy endings, and not all crises end when a ceasefire is called or a cyclone stops spinning. Displacement, shattered infrastructure and health systems can leave people grappling with crisis conditions for months, years or even decades.

To achieve our three zeros and reach those furthest behind, UNFPA must persevere in delivering effectively wherever we are needed.

UNFPA's new Supply Chain Management Unit addresses provision of a responsive, resilient and ready supply chain system, spanning across development and humanitarian situations. The new unit will help us expand access to quality sexual and reproductive health products, while enhancing preparedness and efficiency and reducing costs.

UNFPA has strengthened pre-positioning of humanitarian supplies, including stockpiling in several locations globally, to speed delivery times.

Last year, UNFPA humanitarian action reached an unprecedented 29 million women of reproductive age with sexual and reproductive health information and services in 42 countries. We enabled millions of survivors of gender-based violence to access services through more than 12,000 safe spaces supported by UNFPA in 38 countries.

These results were made possible through the generous support, contributions and partnership of our donors, who provided a record-setting US\$350 million for UNFPA humanitarian interventions.

Almost everywhere, women and girls face a roll-back of fundamental rights that is worsening long-standing inequalities, particularly in the wake of Covid and particularly for women and girls with disabilities and those living in poverty or in remote areas.

Afghanistan today is one such example. The country faces an unprecedented, protracted humanitarian crisis and a very real risk of systemic collapse, threatening decades of development gains. There, every two hours, a woman dies from preventable pregnancy and childbirth-related complications.

UNFPA, together with other humanitarian actors, is on the frontlines in Afghanistan, responding to the needs identified by affected communities. The first quarter of this year, we reached over 66,000 women with maternal health services; over 12,000 victims of GBV with protection services; and over half a million people with reproductive health supplies.

In Ukraine, we are also on the ground, on the frontlines. UNFPA already has delivered some 70 metric tons of reproductive health supplies, equipment and medicines. We are providing safe birth support, post-rape services, and psychosocial care for survivors of sexual violence.

The war having left many older persons without support, in Kharkiv, UNFPA is helping to distribute hygiene supplies in bomb shelters, metro stations, and directly to the homes of women with limited mobility – part of our work to leave no one behind.

As the world faces a global protection crisis, UNFPA estimates that this year more than 69 million people will need gender-based violence services – a 40% increase over last year.

And we continue to focus on countries in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Syria, Yemen, Haiti and so many other places facing a multitude of challenges and at risk of becoming forgotten emergencies. Our programmes are straining to keep up with demand against a backdrop of limited funding.

Two weeks ago, at the African Union Humanitarian Summit, I pledged UNFPA's support to the new African Humanitarian Agency. We will help to ensure safe births, provide psychosocial support for survivors of gender-based violence, assist with the procurement of dignity kits for menstrual hygiene needs, and bring in data support to quantify needs and identify who is being left behind. In Africa and beyond, UNFPA will continue to advocate for placing women and young people at the heart of humanitarian prevention, response, recovery, development and peace-building.

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

UNFPA's achievements are only possible through the continuous support and involvement of our donors and the programme countries who lead the agenda, based on national priorities.

Last year, revenue exceeded the US\$1 billion mark for the fifth year in a row – at a record-setting US\$1.46 billion, surpassing the strategic plan target.

We have worked hard to expand our donor base, and we are proud of the growth we have seen in contributions from international financial institutions and from the private sector. In line with this, I have appointed a Principal Advisor for International Development Finance, based in Washington, DC.

A note regarding core funding, which despite our best efforts, stood at only 28 percent of total resources in 2021, below the UN Funding Compact threshold.

Core funding anchors our work. It supports our sustainable presence in over 120 countries and buttresses our investments in accountability and oversight. Core funding offers UNFPA flexibility to mount an agile response to unforeseen or rapidly evolving challenges, as we saw most recently with Covid-19.

I certainly cannot be confident of the overall resources outlook for 2022 and beyond, due to ongoing risks to peace and stability, and the uncertainties regarding the future impact of the pandemic and other crises. Therefore, I humbly appeal for your continued vigorous support, especially for core resources but also for more flexible, multi-year other resources.

Madam President,

As Executive Director of a rights-based, field-based organization, I am committed to bringing voices from the field to you here in New York. Therefore, with your permission, I am now pleased to turn the floor over to Mr. Harold Robinson, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, for a brief update on UNFPA activities in the region.

[Harold speaks for 4 minutes]

Thank you, Harold, for your presentation. We appreciate your leadership and the important work the LACRO team is doing.

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

A proverb from Morocco tells us: There is no beauty but the beauty of action.

One thing is clear: UNFPA will only succeed if we take action and do so in concert with others.

Everywhere I go women tell me that their biggest desires are for justice and for peace.

Yes, we face challenges, but we also discern significant opportunities. In alliance with our partners, UNFPA will seize every opportunity to promote women and girls' rights and choices and avail them of a better, more just future. A future in which no woman, girl or young person is left out or left behind. Zero.

Thank you.