

STATEMENTS

12 October 2009

Putting People First: Commemorating ICPD at Fifteen

Statement by Thoraya Ahmed Obaid Executive Director United Nations Population Fund

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly, Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, for his opening remarks and for giving me the opportunity to address you at this special commemoration. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his unwavering support to the ICPD Programme of Action.

Fifteen years ago, at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), 179 governments ignited a spark of change that continues to improve the lives of people.

The Programme of Action puts people at the centre of development. It calls for the collection and analysis of population data to guide equitable policy decisions. It positions reproductive health, including family planning, and the healthy relationships and well-being of individuals, as a right. It makes clear that when women are empowered and supported to determine the number and spacing of their children—a decision that is seemingly simple yet so complex – they improve their own lives and the well-being of their families, communities and countries.

The right to sexual and reproductive health and women's empowerment are core to the linkages of population and development. Reproductive choices are central to gender equality and can influence population dynamics. The Cairo agenda addresses the needs and rights of all people, irrespective of their situations, including migrants, refugees and displaced persons, and it makes the connections between population, the environment and peace, security and development.

The holistic Cairo consensus remains practical and pertinent as we confront today's daunting challenges.

Today, I pay tribute to governments and civil society for their accomplishments since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and I call on a more responsive private sector. I pay tribute to Dr. Nafis Sadik, former head of UNFPA, who was the Secretary General of the Cairo Conference. She has devoted her professional life to promoting the rights of women to make decisions about their own lives. And I salute the dedicated staff of UNFPA for their commitment to work with governments, civil society, and communities to implement the Programme of Action, many times under challenging circumstances.

During the past 15 years, we have learned a great deal in carrying the Cairo consensus forward. And I would like to share with you five lessons we have learned that point the way ahead.

First, we know that the aspirations in the Cairo consensus are taking root at the local level. Although the debate on sexual and reproductive health is not always easy, dialogue is expanding and concrete progress is being made. Today, there is growing recognition that cultural values and interpretations of sacred texts can either punish or harm women or liberate and support them. Countries and communities are engaged in conversations and programmes that address culturally loaded issues such as child marriage, girls' education, HIV prevention, female genital mutilation/cutting and violence against women. All over the world, communities are progressively invoking the values and beliefs that protect the rights of women and young people and bringing about change from within. We witness a growing number of men of all walks of life standing side by side with women to end traditional practices that harm women as well as to end violence against women. And here I would like to thank the Secretary-General's leadership for his campaign "UNiTE to end violence against women".

Second, we know that investment is critical. While we keep repeating that no woman should die giving life, women continue to die needlessly during pregnancy and childbirth from preventable causes, one woman during every minute of my statement. The good news is that momentum for maternal health is building, there is growing commitment at the highest levels and now we need to match this commitment with increased funding for a comprehensive package of maternal and reproductive health services to achieve MDG5.