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55th Annual Conference of NGOs

**Rebuilding Societies Emerging from Conflict:
A Shared Responsibility**

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Conference Room 4

10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Restoring Social Services: Identifying Priorities

Good morning, everyone. It is truly a pleasure to be here today at the 55th Annual DPI/NGO Conference. It is an honour to share the podium with such distinguished panellists. And it is a delight to be with representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society.

Three weeks ago, on the 24th of August, at 9:45 in the morning, a baby boy was born in Kabul. He was the first baby born in a 72-bed Danish Emergency Mobile Hospital that was officially opened that day with UNFPA support. The mobile hospital is operating while the area's 52-bed Khair Khana Maternity Hospital undergoes extensive rehabilitation over the next eight months.

For Afghan women and children, this hospital is a life-saver and a life-sustainer. As we all know, Afghanistan has the second highest rates of maternal and child mortality in the world. One in four Afghan children die before the age of 5, and 1 in 17 Afghan women die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Most medical facilities are run down and in dire need of trained personnel. Establishing quality reproductive health services is an urgent priority to save women's and babies' lives.

As part of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, UNFPA is an active participant in the country's reconstruction. Priorities identified together with the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Women's Affairs include strengthening maternal health services and girls' education, with an initial focus on rebuilding health and education infrastructure.

Many local and international NGOs who contribute to these priority areas receive UNFPA support-including the Afghanistan Red Crescent, to run 46 clinics countrywide in training midwives; the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, to upgrade maternal and child health clinics; and a local NGO, Ibn Sina, to upgrade skills of health professionals.

In all war-torn countries, the participation of civil society is essential in restoring social services. Education and health care, including reproductive health care, cannot be restored in a war-shattered country without a great deal of hard work, investment and partnership. We must also realize and accept that nation-building is not a quick job-it is a job that starts with humanitarian relief when the news cameras are rolling and a job that goes on long after news cameras leave.

Overall, there are three real challenges in restoring basic social services:

1. We must reach the most vulnerable,
2. We must ensure a smooth transition from emergency relief to long-term development, and
3. We must foster the active participation of local men and women to build local capacity so that efforts are long-lasting and self-sustaining.

Role of Women

Saving women's lives is a top priority for UNFPA and so is women's participation and empowerment. When it comes to reconstruction and nation-building, women have a key role to play. Women are not only victims in times of conflict, they are peacemakers and peacebuilders. In every country emerging from conflict, a durable, stable peace can only be achieved by respecting human rights and meeting human needs, including the rights and needs of women, and ensuring women's full participation in decision-making and reconstruction.

I think it is important to recognize that in many conflict situations, whether one is talking about Afghanistan, Kosovo, Sierra Leone or East Timor, there

is often no clear demarcation line between war and peace. Yes, a peace agreement may be signed and a United Nations peacekeeping force may be in place, but insecurity lingers.

Sexual abuse and violence

This sense of insecurity is especially strong among women and adolescents, who are often victimized by sexual abuse and violence, which increase during times of crisis. Addressing gender-based violence is a UNFPA priority concern.

For adolescents, who are caught between being children and adults, the violence, which they may have helped perpetrate, may somehow seem normal and this perception is, of course, a tangible threat to peace and reconciliation. After all, it is the people of a nation, through their own local institutions, who are the builders of their own future.

For women, both young and old, the threat and reality of sexual violence and abuse is not easy to ease or erase, and it must be dealt with in a sensitive and effective manner. In post-conflict situations, local citizens need to feel safe and they need real protection. They also need specific training to deal with gender-based violence and the other traumas citizens may have experienced. At UNFPA, we have found that people's lives can start to change when they speak up about the violence in their lives and receive protection and sensitive care.

It is also important to acknowledge that no crisis situation is the same. Every situation is unique-with its own unique challenges. Conditions may be hostile or hospitable, politically charged or on the path to peace.

Coordination

At UNFPA, we have found that advance planning and strong partnerships help us prepare for the worst and enable our relatively small agency to have a significant impact in our core area, which is sexual and reproductive health. In violent conflicts, risks of unsafe delivery, sexually transmitted infections and sexual violence increase as services decline. Complications of

pregnancy and birth are already a leading cause of death for women in the developing world in normal times, so in times of crisis, the situation becomes even more dangerous.

UNFPA's Humanitarian Response Unit coordinates with the United Nations system and other vital partners, including many NGOs that work at both local and international levels. We work very closely with the Reproductive Health for Refugees Consortium—a group of seven prominent international NGOs, which includes the International Rescue Committee. We have also just renewed an agreement of cooperation with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to provide reproductive healthcare for refugees and internally displaced persons and to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Although the need is great for health services to help pregnant women have a safe delivery, to prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections, to prevent HIV infection, and to deal with gender-based violence, I must tell you that it was not until recently that these issues were considered important enough to be included in humanitarian response efforts. It is through the partnership with NGOs working in conflict areas that UNFPA succeeded in directing attention to such pressing issues.

In fact, it was not until the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), when the nations of the world agreed that everyone, including people caught in crisis, should have access to reproductive health services, that action in this area accelerated.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all of the representatives of civil society who participated in the Cairo Conference eight years ago and who continue to remain active in carrying the ICPD agenda forward. We would not have come this far without your insight, commitment and support.

Needs Assessment

Since 1994, we have greatly increased our ability to respond rapidly and address reproductive health needs in crisis situations. The first step of

response is often a rapid needs assessment, followed later by research and data analysis to ensure that basic needs are being met.

In war-torn Kosovo, we supported a survey and interviews with women that documented for the world the use of rape as an instrument of war. As I speak today, UNFPA is preparing to help Afghanistan conduct its first census in decades. We know that a country must have effective data before it can determine priorities and appropriate interventions.

Emergency Relief

During the emergency phase of a crisis, we dispatch pre-packaged kits of health supplies. Last year, we dispatched shipments to 24 countries. Clean delivery kits, which cost \$1.25 each, have helped mothers in Afghanistan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, East Timor and other countries, to deliver safely. Each kit contains plastic sheeting, razor blades to cut the umbilical cord and string to tie it, and soap to clean up. I think all of us in this room can agree that \$1.25 is a small amount to pay to help a mother and baby survive.

Last year, when hundreds of thousands of Afghans fled their homes to escape armed conflict, UNFPA pre-positioned emergency health supplies in the countries bordering Afghanistan.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, where there have been reports of Palestinian women dying during delivery at checkpoints because they are unable to get medical care, UNFPA is training skilled birth attendants at the community level, and we have helped set up a telephone hotline so women can find emergency medical services in their hour of need.

HIV/AIDS

Another priority area for UNFPA is HIV prevention. All over the world, but especially in Africa, people uprooted by conflict, living in extreme poverty or caught in disaster's wake, face a much greater risk of being infected with HIV, and the resources currently available to combat HIV/AIDS in crisis-stricken communities are woefully inadequate.

Aside from the lack of funding, the greatest challenge of fighting HIV/AIDS is to inform and educate crisis-affected communities about the virus and prevent stigmatization of its victims. Ignorance and discrimination feed the epidemic. The challenge is to spread the truth about HIV/AIDS faster than the virus spreads and provide condoms for protection. People must be able to openly discuss the epidemic and how to prevent infection. There is an immense lack of knowledge about the virus and people are not empowered with means and knowledge on how to fight it. Civil society partnerships are indispensable in the fight against AIDS because all successes in curbing the spread of HIV have been achieved in close collaboration with local communities.

In war-shattered Sierra Leone, where HIV/AIDS is rapidly spreading, UNFPA and other United Nations agencies and NGO partners are working to provide life-saving information, services and skills to girls and women who were abducted and raped during the conflict, war affected youth, as well as United Nations peacekeepers and uniformed personnel. Sierra Leone presently has the largest United Nations peacekeeping operation, with more than 17,000 soldiers. Providing peacekeepers with training on gender awareness and HIV prevention can make a difference because they are on the frontlines when it comes to HIV prevention and they are on the frontlines as role models for male responsibility.

In Sierra Leone, UNFPA is supporting a local NGO, called "Women in Crisis", that is helping women and girls who have been forced into the sex trade. The group has set up two shelters where women and girls learn how to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and how to earn a living through income-generation activities. Hopefully, these skills will enable them to turn their situation around and will empower them to build a better life.

For countries that are struggling to get back on their feet, whose schools and hospitals have been destroyed, adequate international funding is absolutely essential. UNFPA is an integral part of the United Nations humanitarian and

development system and we support frontline efforts for reconstruction and nation-building. But as many of you know, UNFPA lost \$34 million in funding this year from the United States. And it is poor women and men around the world who will suffer as a result. But it is also our partnerships with civil society, especially NGOs, that will suffer because they are our partners in re-establishing basic services and rebuilding the countries.

I cannot stand in front of this gathering of NGOs and talk about their contribution to development and rebuilding societies without mentioning the initiative of some American citizens who have launched a grass-roots campaign, the 34 Million Friends Campaign, to support the work of UNFPA. It is with great pleasure to inform you that envelopes with one dollar bills as well as cheques with various amounts, the highest being US\$25,000 from an individual - a man - have begun reaching our office. It is with great gratitude for the work of many women and men in the United States that grass-root initiative is reaching the poor globally.

I do not need to remind you that UNFPA was one of the first United Nations agencies to cooperate widely and on the global level with NGOs and we remain convinced that it is only through effective partnerships that we can meet our common goals for ensuring that people enjoy the full extent of their human rights: social, economic, cultural as well as political rights.

Thank you.