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United Nations Fonds des Nations Unies
Population Fund pour la population

PRESS RELEASE

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UNFPA Calls for Action on Women and Population

JOHANNESBURG, 30 August—Progress towards sustainable development must include progress in ensuring reproductive health and women’s rights, leaders of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) declared today.

In a statement delivered for UNFPA Executive Director Thoraya Obaid, Kunio Waki, UNFPA Deputy Executive Director (Programme), told a plenary session of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) here that global population, environmental issues and women’s reproductive health and rights are interrelated.

“Today, our world is dangerously out of balance,” Mr. Waki said. “One fifth of the world’s people consume four fifths of the world’s resources while a billion people have no access to safe drinking water and 3 billion lack adequate sanitation. ... The poor suffer the most from environmental degradation and are the most vulnerable to global climate change.”

“The combination of poverty, population pressures and environmental stress is a powerful destabilizing force, driving migration from rural areas to cities, and across national borders.”

“We cannot reduce poverty and protect natural resources without addressing population issues.” Population is growing by 77 million people every year—200,000 per day—most of them in the world’s least-developed countries, where hunger, water scarcity, HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation are already serious problems.

But the population, expected to reach 9 billion by 2050, is not growing as fast as it did, Mr. Waki said, because overall fertility rates have dropped by half in the developing world since 1969, when UNFPA was created. “This is truly an historical achievement.”

“For this we can thank the world’s women and the governments that gave them support and choices,” he said. “The last two generations of women have chosen to have smaller families, and the next generation will do the same if they have access to education, health services and family planning, and if they are confident the children they do have will survive.

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“Everything we have learned shows that when women are empowered—through laws that protect their rights, healthcare that protects their health, and education that expands their opportunities, the benefits extend far beyond the individual,” Mr. Waki stressed. “Greater progress towards sustainable development depends in part on greater progress for women. Women need access to education, credit, income opportunities and land ownership.”

International funding must increase to meet these objectives, he said.

Universal access to education and reproductive health, including family planning, safe motherhood and HIV prevention—goals of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development—“are key to meeting the Millennium Development Goals of cutting global poverty and hunger in half by 2015, reducing maternal and child mortality, curbing HIV/AIDS, advancing gender equality, and promoting environmentally sustainable development”, he said.

Yet “spending on population assistance is declining and has dropped by 25 per cent since 1995” and is now less than half the assistance targets agreed at Cairo, Mr. Waki noted.

“Evidence indicates that if we continue on this course, the clashes between humankind and nature will only grow worse.”

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UNFPA is the world's largest multilateral source of population assistance, with programmes in 142 countries. Since it became operational in 1969, the Fund has provided some \$5.6 billion to developing countries to meet reproductive health needs and support sustainable development.

The full text of Mr. Waki’s statement is available at

<http://www.un.org/events/wssd/statements/unfpaE.htm>.

An online video is at <http://www.un.org/webcast/wssd/020830unfpa.ram>.

For more information: www.unfpa.org.

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