



Check against Delivery

**Meeting to Review Progress in the
Implementation of the
SIDS Programme of Action**

Population and Development

**Statement
by**

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**Mauritius
13 January 2005**

Good morning/afternoon.

It is my pleasure to deliver a statement on behalf of Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, the Executive Director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund.

I would like to make three key points today. One is that investing in people, particularly women and young people, is a surefire way to advance economic and social development. Progress depends on a healthy and educated population. This has been shown over and over again. And it is even more important today in the era of advanced globalization. Expanding human capacity and opportunities is absolutely critical.

The second point I would like to make is that population matters. Population is about counting people and making every person count. Population is about knowing where people are, what they need to improve their lives and responding to these needs.

We know that fertility and mortality rates are largely determined by access to education and health services. And here reproductive health services are particularly important because these services—for family planning, safe motherhood and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections—contribute directly to key development goals. Here I am speaking of the Millennium Development goals to reduce poverty, improve maternal health, reduce child mortality and slow the spread of HIV and AIDS.

And the third point I would like to make is that achieving sustainable development requires striking a balance between population, resources and consumption. This balance, which requires sound planning and policymaking, has a direct impact not only on the prospects and opportunities for the current generation—but also for future generations.

Environmental Concerns/Natural Disaster

This balance requires the sound management of natural resources. In many nations, population density, changing lifestyles and agricultural practices have continued to increase pressure on already limited resources.

Another pressing challenge, which has been painfully highlighted by the recent tsunami, is the management of natural disasters. UNFPA stands in solidarity with the people who were affected by this tragedy. We are working within the UN system and with other partners to mount a coordinated and effective response. And we also know that early preparation and warning systems are absolutely critical.

Population and Development

Also essential are sound social policies and programmes that meet people's needs. This requires good data collection and analysis to better understand people's situations. And it requires the integration of population trends and issues into development planning, policies and programmes.

During the past ten years, significant efforts have been made by all countries to incorporate population concerns into their development strategies, and the small island developing States are no exception. This was highlighted during

the 10-year review of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. However, one of the remaining challenges is to strengthen local capacity for data collection, analysis and monitoring of programmes.

Reproductive Health

The majority of small island States have taken actions to integrate reproductive health in their primary health system and to make these services more widely available. This is good news because reproductive health and rights are key to the advancement of women, the health of a population and the reduction of poverty.

HIV/AIDS

Reproductive health and rights are also critical to the fight against AIDS. Scaled up efforts and investments are needed to fight HIV/AIDS in the small island developing States. One of the most effective entry points is the maternal health and family planning clinics that have been established over the past decades. This network is especially important for reaching women, who are particularly vulnerable to infection due to gender discrimination and violence. Progress is being made but greater action is urgently needed, particularly in countries with growing epidemics. As you know, the Caribbean has the second highest infection rates in the world. So clearly greater efforts are needed in this region.

Gender Equality

Allow me now to turn to an issue that affects all others and that is the status of women. I am happy to report that small island States recognize the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment to development.

All 37 small island States that responded to UNFPA's survey to measure progress since the Cairo Population Conference reported measures to protect the rights of women and girls and to promote male involvement. However, areas of major concern remain gender based violence and the political participation of women.

In closing, I would like to stress that when women are healthy and educated, the benefits extend beyond the individual to the family, the community and the entire nation. Therefore, investing in women should be viewed as a priority poverty reduction strategy.

I would like to assure you that UNFPA will continue to work with small island developing States to improve human well-being and the protection of natural resources.

Thank you.