



United Nations Population Fund

Statement on the Occasion of International Women's Day **Message of Harold Robinson, Representative,** **UNFPA Office for the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean**

Kingston, Jamaica (8 March 2008): In the face of economic challenges, some governments may be tempted to put gender issues on the back burner. But the evidence shows that the best way to break the cycle of poverty and achieve a better quality of life for all is to make targeted investments towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Investing in women means investing in families, communities and nations. When women have resources they tend to spend them on education and health for their children, who then face better employment and life prospects.

UNFPA is pleased to note that despite the economic and financial challenges, several countries in the Caribbean are taking positive steps to invest in women. A few are far advanced in developing national gender policies: Jamaica among them. We salute the governments, gender machineries and the stalwarts who are driving the process and encourage the governments to make the finalization and implementation of these policies a priority.

Even as we note progress in some areas, we must draw attention to others like maternal health where there's rising need, but limited resources resulting in death and distress. Every minute, one woman somewhere in the world dies due to complications in pregnancy or childbirth, adding up to half a million women dying every year. In the Caribbean, maternal mortality rates range between 60-170 / 100,000 live births. In Jamaica, for every 100 thousand live births there are 95 deaths. The fact is that many of these deaths could be prevented, if every woman had access to reproductive health services.

More than 200 million women worldwide have an unmet need for family planning. In Jamaica, the unmet need is estimated at 22%. Millions around the world die of AIDS every year and HIV continues to spread, threatening people's lives and the development and stability of entire nations. By guaranteeing universal access to reproductive health, we can reduce poverty, reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, and meet the need for family planning and also reduce maternal, newborn and child deaths.

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Today, on International Women's Day, we call on governments to increase investments in women and girls. We urge all partners to invest in national health systems, training of skilled birth attendants and promoting family planning.

We must remember that health is wealth. By investing in women's reproductive health and well-being, we will stand a better chance of achieving the Millennium Development Goals and a better quality of life for all.

THE END

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

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