

Greetings

Hon. John Junor, Minister of Health

Mrs. Mary Clarke of the Planning Institute of Jamaica

Distinguished Guests

Members of the Media

UNFPA friends and colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

It's my pleasure to welcome you here today to the launch of the 2005 State Of World Population Report. The State of World Population Report is an annual publication developed and presented by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund. Of course you would know by now that UNFPA is an international development agency that promotes the right of everyone; woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. We also support countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty.

The State of World Population report was first published in 1978 and each year it focuses on issues that are of current interest and concern for the future. Some of the topics that have been highlighted in the past include: sexual and reproductive health and rights; meeting the needs of the youth population; population and the environment; poverty; and the Cairo Consensus.

This year the focus is on gender equality under the title: “The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals.”

Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA notes that “achieving the Millennium Development Goals requires healthy men and women working together hand in hand as equals.” Sadly, despite the fact that the United Nations Charter, which was promulgated 60 years ago enshrined the equal rights of women and men, there are still laws and practices that contradict the equality norms set out in this and other international documents and agreements. As a consequence, across the world women and girls face discrimination. They have fewer social, economic and legal rights than men.

It is hard to believe that in the twenty first century ‘every minute a woman dies from complications of childbirth or pregnancy, and another 20 are seriously injured or disabled. Virtually all- 99% of these maternal deaths occur in developing countries due to lack of emergency care, which is readily available to wealthier women.

Imbalances in decision making power, gender-based violence, economic insecurity and other harmful practices make women particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. These factors limit women’s ability to negotiate the use of condoms with their husbands and

partners as a result they end up being the new face of the disease as the majority of new HIV infections take place among women and girls. Although the epidemic initially affected mostly men, today approximately half of the 40 million people living with HIV are women.

The point that the report makes is a simple one “Gender equality reduces poverty and saves lives.’ It therefore recommends that countries invest in women and girls as a major step toward fulfilling the promises made to the world’s women and satisfying the poverty reduction goals agreed to at the 2000 Millennium Summit and reaffirmed by last month’s World Summit in New York.

It is therefore an urgent call to action for world leaders to act now to ensure that there is universal education for all: girls and boys; that economic opportunities are open to women; that families, especially those living in poverty benefit from the support of healthy mothers and that women are fully empowered to participate in politics and decision-making.

Let me hasten to add though that gender equality is not only about women, it is about how both men and women are given the same choices, opportunities and means to fulfill their expectations in

life. It is also about engaging men and boys in the process of achieving gender equality for all.

There can be no question about the benefits of gender equality, they include a higher quality of life for individual women and girls, but also stronger families, communities and countries.

In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals men must be encouraged to fulfill their various roles, as sons, husbands, sexual partners, fathers, elders, educators, health providers, journalists and policymakers. It involves offering them opportunities to reflect on their own history and experiences, their socialization into traditional ideas about household roles and childrearing. Studies confirm that worldwide, fathers contribute far less time to direct childcare than mothers and even when men participate in child care they typically define this case as “helping out’ not a task for which they are responsible. Men must begin to question these negative gender attitudes and to recognize how gender inequities harm their partners and themselves.

Jamaica has made significant progress in some aspects of gender equality but there are still areas that need intervention, like ensuring that the prospects brought about by the higher education rates among girls are not diluted in the labor market; ensuring a reduction in the number of female headed households now living below the poverty line...currently two thirds of the poorest

households are female headed. Gender-based violence, trafficking, and the feminization of HIV/AIDS and poverty continue to pose threats to the development of Jamaica because as Thoraya says ‘progress for women is progress for all’ and in this case lack of progress in some of these key areas is lack of progress for all Jamaicans. Equality also calls for special attention to be given to specific issues affecting males such as their under participation and/or under achievement in education, their more visible presence in prisons, morgues and crime statistics, all of these are particularly relevant in the case of Jamaica as well as in the rest of the Caribbean.

In closing, let me once again thank you for joining us for the launch of this very important document, which we believe has significant relevance for how we approach development and the movement to end poverty once and for all.

Thank you.