



For Immediate Release

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**Government of Antigua & Barbuda, CARICOM and UNFPA Join Forces
To Promote Universal Access to Reproductive Health**

Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health of Antigua and Barbuda, Mrs. Clara Emanuel, in support of a holistic approach to health, has called for measures to be put in place to address the cycle of ill health, particularly in relation to women's reproductive health.

Noting that healthy mothers are most likely to produce healthy babies, the Permanent Secretary drew attention to global reports that every day, more than 1,400 women and adolescent girls die giving life and 40,000 more are disfigured. Against this background, she suggested that these measures should take effect even before conception begins and cautioned that in some cases, it is wise or advisable that conception does not take place.

The Permanent Secretary was speaking at the opening ceremony of a workshop on Reproductive Health Commodity Security (RHCS), put on by the UNFPA and CARICOM in association with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, on Monday, October 22, 2007 at Jolly Beach Hotel, in Bolans Antigua.

A state of security in reproductive health commodities is achieved when all individuals can obtain and use affordable, quality reproductive health commodities of their choice whenever they need them. This, Mrs. Emanuel stressed is critical, if people are to have a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and be in a position to freely exercise their right to decide, if, when and how many children they have. She warned that if global action is not taken to ensure fulfillment of the commitment of world leaders to provide universal access to reproductive health by 2015, "our working population will decrease significantly [with] serious implications for national and global sustainability".

UNFPA has been spearheading a programme to build capacity and ensure universal access to reproductive health services, which includes access to voluntary family planning, prevention of unplanned pregnancies and the provision of high quality pregnancy and delivery care. The workshop, now on from October 22-24, 2007 is designed to equip key partners in the health services with the knowledge and skills to develop effective action plans, forecast commodity needs at the country level, identify under-served populations and develop the appropriate mix of strategies to meet their reproductive health needs.

Harold Robinson, UNFPA Representative for the Office of the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean, in his address at the opening ceremony, noted that achieving universal access to reproductive health services was instrumental in realizing other MDGs, particularly those relating to maternal health, infant and child health and reduction in HIV/AIDS. He pledged support to the countries of the region in the development of their action plans to achieve reproductive health commodity security in their respective countries.

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