



STATEMENT BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON**

AT

**THE UNITED NATIONS POPULATION
AWARD CEREMONY**

**TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL CHAMBER
UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
NEW YORK
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Madam Chairperson, Mr. Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Obaid, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for me to join you today on the occasion of the United Nations Population Award Ceremony for 2006. I would like to thank you, Ambassador Bahemuka, Chairperson of the Committee for the United Nations Population Award, for inviting me to this important event and highlighting the General Assembly's ownership of the award.

It has been nearly 25 years since the award was established by the General Assembly. I believe this is the first time that the President of the General Assembly has had the honour to be present at this occasion.

By recognizing individuals and institutions each year that have made the most outstanding contribution to the awareness of population issues, the Population Award serves to remind us that good population policies are key to poverty eradication and sustainable development.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I am delighted to congratulate this year's award winners: Dr. Halida Hanum Akhter, Director-General of the Family Planning Association of Bangladesh, and the Fondation Pour la Sante Reproductive et l'Education Familiale (FOSREF) of Haiti, represented today by its Executive Director, Dr. Fritz Moise. I know that you were chosen from a field of highly qualified nominees. It is a measure of your contributions that you emerged as the laureates.

The focus of your work on reproductive health is a vital element of our overall effort to save and improve the lives of millions of people around the world. Reproductive health services work to reduce maternal and child mortality, to enable couples to plan their families, to foster informed and responsible behaviour and to prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections, not least HIV/AIDS. I am glad to say that the General Assembly Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS adopted last Friday has strong references to the importance of sexual and reproductive health, including a clear reaffirmation of the goal of achieving universal access to reproductive health by 2015, as set out at the International Conference on Population and Development.

Despite their proven effectiveness, reproductive health services remain out of reach for far too many people, putting their lives and futures at risk. As a result, each year half a million women die needlessly from complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Around 4 million people are newly infected with HIV every year. There is no other health indicator that displays such a glaring gap between rich and poor. Today, 99% of maternal deaths occur in developing countries. In Sweden, one in three hundred children die before their fifth birthday. In Sierra Leone, the figure is one in three.

And the ramifications extend far beyond the individual. Today the 50 poorest countries are expected to double their population by 2050. It is estimated that if these countries invested in family planning and education, they could reduce poverty by 14 per cent by the year 2015. They could save the lives of countless mothers and babies, expand choices and opportunities, reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, and generate savings and economic growth through the demographic changes brought about by slower population growth.

These issues intersect with a major political, economic and moral imperative of our times – ensuring gender equality. As global leaders stated at September’s World Summit, progress for women is progress for all. The success of international family planning shows us that when women have choices they can change their lives and those of their communities. By investing in reproductive health services, we are investing in people and their potential. We are unleashing higher levels of participation and productivity among the 1.7 billion women who are in their reproductive and productive years.

By committing themselves to these issues in their own ways and for their successes, both Dr. Akhter and FOSREF have gained recognition and acclaim as powerful agents of change for development, and for enhancing the rights and quality of lives of people. They are messengers of hope, changing the world to make it a better place to live, today and for generations to come. It is my hope that the world will join us in honouring them.

It is also my hope that governments and foundations will contribute to the Trust Fund for the United Nations Population Award in the coming years to enable us to continue to honour those who have excelled and shown extraordinary commitment in the field of population and development to improve human well-being. Today we are paying tribute to two eminent representatives of this commitment.