

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

**REMARKS AT THE OPENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SPECIAL SESSION ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

New York, 22 September 2014

Your Excellency Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Musevini, President of Uganda,
Your Excellency Mr. Sam Kutesa, President of the General Assembly,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome, everyone, to this important special session I thank all those who have supported it. I applaud the Commission on Population and Development for its leadership. I commend Under-Secretary-General Wu Hongbo and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, especially its Population Division, whose authoritative studies are globally renown.

Today we mark twenty years since the successful International Conference on Population and Development.

The conference was a global turning point. Its Programme of Action was built on fundamental principles affirming that development should centre on people.

It emphasized the value of investing in women and girls. And it affirmed the importance of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

The world agreed in Cairo that when women and girls get the education they deserve, societies are more productive. When their rights are protected, societies are more just. And when they are empowered to determine their own future, societies become stronger.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Vingt ans plus tard, ces sages principes guident encore notre action.

En deux décennies, près d'un milliard de personnes ont échappé à la misère. La mortalité maternelle a été réduite de près de 50 %. Nous avons progressé sur le plan de l'égalité des sexes, et avons notamment atteint la parité entre filles et garçons dans l'enseignement primaire.

D'avantage de femmes peuvent choisir le nombre d'enfants qu'elles auront et le moment où elles les auront.

D'avantage de lois permettent à un plus grand nombre de personnes d'exercer les droits énoncés dans la Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme et la Charte des Nations Unies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Cairo Programme of Action has made a meaningful difference in people's lives.

People like 15-year old Zeinabou of Niger. She was married to a violent older man. With the UN's help, she now advocates to end child marriage.

People like Fajra, a mother in Tunisia. She had to drop out of school when she was just eight. But with UN support, her own daughter graduated from university.

People like 25-year-old Marsa who had to give birth in a displacement camp in South Sudan. She bled uncontrollably in labour – but she was saved by a midwife who learned life-saving skills through a UNFPA-supported programme.

And people like Lina, a mother in the Philippines. She said so clearly what all of us know is true, quote: "A woman should have the right to choose how many children she wants. It's a basic human right."

I applaud the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, for leading our global push to translate the Cairo Programme of Action into meaningful change for so many people. I commend its Executive Director, Babatunde Osotimehin, for his strong leadership.

Many of you have helped to advance global progress. I salute your advocacy and your activities.

And I ask you to do even more.

Millions of people still suffer from hunger and poverty and die from preventable causes. They cannot meet basic needs, find meaningful work, or access health and education services. Millions still cannot enjoy their basic rights.

We have seen the rise of the global middle class – but this has come with inequalities within and between countries. Since 1994, there have been only limited improvements in the lives of the estimated 1 billion people living in the poorest countries. Their life expectancies continue to be unacceptably low.

As we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Cairo conference and look ahead to future, we cannot afford to short-change development. That is why we are addressing three overarching challenges.

First, we are intensifying efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by the 2015 deadline.

Second, we are defining a bold and ambitious post-2015 development agenda that sets the world on a path towards inclusive, sustainable development.

Third, we are working to deliver a meaningful climate change agreement before the end of next year. Tomorrow's Climate Summit should generate strong political will with bold announcements.

As we advance on all these fronts, we have to remember the vision of Cairo – especially the priority it placed on reproductive health.

We must confront the fact that some 800 women still die each day from causes related to pregnancy or childbirth. An estimated 8.7 million young women in developing countries resort to unsafe abortions every year. They urgently need our protection.

We also have to be guided by the wisdom of the Cairo conference as we confront major demographic trends, including urbanization, migration, population ageing and the largest generation of young people in history.

We must renew our pledge to protect people – especially women and girls – as we strive to eradicate extreme poverty, protect the rights and dignity of all people and secure the future of our planet for generations to come.

Today, we look back with pride over the past 20 years – and we look ahead with resolve to achieve much greater progress for generations to come.

Thank you.