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On the Occasion of World Population Day 11 July 2008

Today as we commemorate World Population Day, let us renew our commitment to human dignity and the right to live in freedom from fear and want. Let us accelerate efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals to eliminate extreme poverty and hunger and to improve the health of people and our planet.

We must join forces to advance women's empowerment and to ensure universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Reproductive health services protect the health of women, mothers and their babies.

Urgent action is needed because the goal to improve maternal health is generating the least resources and lagging the furthest behind.

Maternal death and disability could be reduced dramatically if every woman had access to health services throughout her lifecycle, especially during pregnancy and childbirth. Today millions of women lack access to health services, which puts their lives at risk.

Now is the time to accelerate action to ensure that health services reach women in the communities in which they live. Three reproductive health services are vital for maternal health: skilled attendance at birth, emergency obstetric care and family planning to time and space births.

Family planning is also essential to women's empowerment and gender equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life. Information and services for family planning allow individuals and couples to realize their right to determine the number, spacing and timing of their children.

Family planning is also an effective means in the fight against poverty. Parents can plan ahead and devote more of their resources to the education and health of each child, which benefits the family, community and nation.

Today, on World Population Day, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, pledges its commitment to support health and equal opportunity for all people.

We call on all governments to ensure universal access to reproductive health by 2015 and to back up this promise with political commitment and financial investment. It is time to make reproductive health a priority.

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