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*On behalf of  
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**World Summit on Sustainable Development**

**Population, Poverty and Environment**

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to deliver this statement to the World Summit on Sustainable Development on behalf of Thoraya Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund.

We are gathered here in this great city of Johannesburg on an urgent global mission. We are here to find the ways, and the means, to save our planet from further destruction and to reduce the poverty that is so widespread today.

We can no longer afford to stand by as the gap between rich and poor continues to widen and 800 million people go to bed hungry every night.

We can no longer afford to stand by as water becomes a scarce commodity for millions of people and great stretches of land become too degraded to bear life-sustaining crops.

We can no longer afford to stand by as global warming presents an increasingly visible threat and the poor and vulnerable will suffer disproportionately from its effects.

And we can no longer afford to stand by as discrimination and violence threaten millions of women and girls, robbing them of their rightful place to participate in finding the solutions we need to survive.

Today, our world is dangerously out of balance. One-fifth of the world's people consume four-fifths of the world's resources while a billion people have no access to safe drinking water and 3 billion lack adequate sanitation. One-sixth of humanity struggles to survive on less than \$1 a day.

Evidence indicates that if we continue on this course, the clashes between humankind and nature will only grow worse.

We are here at this World Summit to put our world on a more sustainable course.

And one of the central issues we must face is population. We cannot reduce poverty and protect natural resources without addressing population issues.

It took thousands and thousands of years for our species to reach the 1 billion mark in 1830, but just 170 years more to reach 6 billion people a few years ago.

Since the Rio Earth Summit, world population has grown by 750 million people.

Because half of all people are younger than 25, global population is expected to reach 9 billion by the year 2050. Each year 77 million more people are added to our planet, over 200,000 people every day—almost all in the developing world and overwhelming in the cities.

But we can point to success. Global population is not growing as fast as it did before; the rate of growth is slowing down. And for this we can thank the world's women and the governments that gave them support and choices. Since 1969, when UNFPA was created, overall fertility rates have dropped by half in the developing world. This is truly an historical achievement.

The last two generations of women have chosen to have smaller families, and the next generation will do the same if they have access to education, health services and family planning and if they are confident the children they do have will survive.



But even though we are making progress, rapid population growth in many poor countries, urbanization, HIV/AIDS, and massive population movements continue to present daunting challenges.

Today, the most rapid growth is occurring in the world's least developed countries, where population is expected to triple over the next 50 years. Already, these countries are the least able to provide basic services and are among the most severely challenged by hunger, HIV/AIDS, water scarcity and environmental degradation.

The combination of poverty, population pressures and environmental stress is a powerful destabilizing force, driving migration from rural areas to cities, and across national borders. Already, governments are hard-pressed to provide jobs, basic infrastructure and social services in both rural and urban areas and many migrants can be found in spreading shantytowns and slums.

Poverty and population pressures also affect land use and food and water security. Poor rural farmers often expand food production into forested or marginal lands, threatening the delicate environmental balance. People also turn to the forest for fuel wood, furthering deforestation. In many countries, women are spending more and more hours each day collecting fuel wood and water, taking time away from other important activities.

All over the developing world, women are the managers of natural resources. Therefore, greater progress towards sustainable development depends in part on greater progress for women. Women need access to education, credit, income opportunities, and land ownership.

Everything we have learned shows that when women are empowered—through laws that protect their rights, healthcare that protects their health, and education

that expands their opportunities, the benefits extend far beyond the individual. Families are better off and nations are too.

Since 1970, developing countries with lower fertility and slower population growth have seen higher productivity, more savings and more productive investment. They have registered faster economic growth. They have integrated population and gender concerns into development policies and programmes.

In 1994, world leaders agreed at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo that universal access to education and healthcare, including family planning, safe motherhood and HIV prevention, is critical. These population goals are key to meeting the Millennium Development Goals of cutting global poverty and hunger in half by 2015, reducing maternal and child mortality, curbing HIV/AIDS, advancing gender equality, and promoting environmentally sustainable development.

So let us use this opportunity in Johannesburg to undertake real commitments.

Let us expand access to food, education, healthcare and family planning, clean water and sanitation.

Let us reduce carbon emissions and develop environmentally friendly technologies for rich and poor countries alike.

Let us end the hideous discrimination and violence that threaten so many women and girls today, and let us take steps so that all people can enjoy their full human rights.

And let us pledge full financial support for international development goals.

Despite the central importance of population issues, spending on population assistance is declining and has dropped by 25 per cent since 1995. This comes at a time when human needs are growing and we have the largest youth generation in history—the first ever to grow up with HIV/AIDS.

Today, despite agreement, international funding for the goals set in Cairo at the International Conference on Population and Development has not even reached the halfway mark. Only five countries—the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Luxembourg—have met or achieved their "fair share" of the target funding. The United States trails far behind.

The Monterrey Consensus that was achieved at the International Conference on Financing for Development demonstrates there is a will to increase financial flows and speed debt relief to achieve sustainable development. Now is the time to translate that political will into action. Some of the resources freed from debt relief should be channelled to education and healthcare, especially family planning, safe motherhood and HIV/AIDS education and prevention. This will help reduce population pressures and poverty, and increase prospects for sustainable development.

Thank you.