

Check against delivery



Statement by
Dr. Natalia Kanem
Executive Director, UNFPA

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Good morning. *Buenos dias*. We've prepared a video showing you some of the energy and excitement of the first two ICPD30 Global Dialogues, the youth dialogue in Benin and the demographic diversity dialogue in Bangladesh. Shall we view it now? [*Video plays.*]

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,
Dear colleagues, dear friends,

I greet you in peace, so desperately needed in our turbulent world.

I often remark that the Programme of Action of the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) is evergreen. In no way is it an outdated agenda: it is still an unfulfilled agenda. The youth delegates' action agenda from Benin shows just how true that is, and I am confident that young people will keep the ICPD torch burning bright in the years to come.

The global dialogue on demographic diversity and sustainable development in Dhaka last month also demonstrated how relevant the visionary ICPD Programme of Action remains. Overarching demographic trends are top of mind for governments and policymakers today – population growth in some places, ageing in others, migration, climate displacements, among many other challenges – and that's unlikely to abate anytime soon.

Therefore, it's imperative that we heed the ICPD call to focus on people, their dignity and their human rights, not just the numbers.

This year of ICPD30, we can confidently state that the ICPD story is the story of a continuum of victories: People are living longer, healthier lives. Fewer women die while giving life, and more women and couples have access to modern contraception, which means that more pregnancies are planned and wanted than ever before.

It's much safer to be a woman today, whether in Botswana or Brazil; Nigeria or Nauru; it's easier for a girl to get an education, safer to give birth, more possible for a young woman to choose her life's trajectory.

What's needed now is to accelerate progress and bring everyone along.

Just this February, the Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia showed me a photo of Sister Nega. In pioneering the country's family planning programme, she was the first nurse to insert an intrauterine device (an IUD) in 1966.

Groundbreaking!

Every journey begins with a single step.

Today, there are more than a quarter of a million IUD users in Ethiopia, and nearly 22 million women use modern methods of family planning.

The gains in women’s rights and bodily autonomy over the past 30 years are gains we fought for and achieved together – following that exemplary multilateral agreement at the Cairo ICPD. These gains sprang forth from investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights, which increased fivefold after countries agreed in the year 2000 “to build a world with no one left behind”.

Today, new technologies have advanced the frontiers of medicine, allowing for real-time information sharing, and amplifying our ability to collect and process data.

At the third and final ICPD30 Global Dialogue, to take place here in New York June 27th and 28th, we will discuss how to harness the power of technology to advance women’s health, rights, and choices, without the collateral damage of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Please join us.

Today, we know much more about the world and its needs – and hopefully the solutions – than ever before in human history. Investment, collective action, and political will make a big difference.

We see this in the results that UNFPA achieved with the Board’s support and guidance, as outlined in my annual report.

Just in the first two years of our current strategic plan, UNFPA helped avert more than 31 million unintended pregnancies and 9.5 million unsafe abortions.

We assisted 2.4 million safe deliveries in humanitarian-affected countries and trained approximately 200,000 midwives.

Some 350,000 women and young people with disabilities benefited from services supported by UNFPA.

In 2023, 44 country participants in the UNFPA Supplies Partnership formalized their Compact agreements, signaling their commitment to increase domestic budget allocations for contraceptives. What a great example of moving from funding to financing.

Investments such as these are life-changing for women like Sara, a young mother of two in Mozambique. Since choosing a self-injectable method, she no longer has to walk 10 kilometres or pay for transport to obtain contraception, saving her time and money, and allowing her to finish her education.

Such powerful investments assist the individual. However, they also make solid economic sense for societies.

UNFPA research shows that every dollar invested in ending preventable maternal deaths and the unmet need for family planning will bring economic benefits of 8 dollars and 40 cents by the year 2050.

Mr. President,

When we look at progress over the past three decades there is much to celebrate.

Yet, this is no time for resting on our laurels.

While UNFPA achieved its strategic plan outputs, global-level progress towards the three transformative results has ground to a halt.

Since 2016, annual reductions in maternal deaths flatlined. Progress towards meeting the need for family planning similarly stalled. And may I emphasize, the situation would be even worse if not for the efforts of UNFPA.

Differentiated data and analysis make a difference.

We have, for the first time, data on whether women's bodily autonomy is strengthening over time – and I can tell you that in 40 per cent of countries studied, it's actually diminishing.

Why?

The evidence points to a perfect storm of factors:

- Conflict, the climate crisis and the lingering effects of the Covid pandemic continue to cause social and economic disruptions.

- Human reproduction is being politicized relentlessly, with increasing pushback against agreed reproductive rights.
- Worsening inequalities mean that we are adding to the numbers of people left behind.

Worrisomely, UNFPA's 2024 State of World Population report – titled *Interwoven Lives, Threads of Hope: Ending inequalities in sexual and reproductive health and rights* – shows that in recent decades barriers to health care fell fastest for women already more affluent, more educated and privileged. In other words, the groups that benefited the most had the fewest barriers to begin with.

How can it be that still today women of African descent experience higher rates of mistreatment and neglect at the hands of their health care providers? Indigenous women are routinely denied culturally appropriate maternal health care.

As a result, these two groups are much more likely – in some places six times more likely – to die in pregnancy or childbirth. Swift action is needed to end these disparities once and for all.

Women and young people with disabilities, migrants, people living with HIV, LGBTQI+ and gender diverse people continue to experience discrimination and exclusion when they seek sexual and reproductive health care. As we celebrate sexual diversities during the Pride month of June, let us all commit to the safety and wellbeing of everyone, regardless of who they are or who they love.

Data illuminate the shadows where the most vulnerable people dwell. To reach those furthest behind, we first have to see them and then we have to prioritize interventions to reach them. No one is unreachable, no location too remote. If someone seems hard to reach, it means we have not yet tried hard enough.

Our rich human tapestry is only as strong as the weakest thread. When systems work for those on the margins, they work for everyone. This is how we accelerate progress for all.

UNFPA advises governments on census and data collection in all regions of the world. To date, around 70 percent of the population scheduled, has been counted in the 2020 census round. Given the Covid interruption, this is a big success.

And we are collecting more and better data, disaggregated by age, by location, by disability, by ethnicity, and so much more, in a census round with the benefit of modern technology, no more handwritten entries, which makes access to data possible within a much shorter time span.

For example, Brazil, the country with the largest diaspora of people of African descent, for the first time counted members of the historically neglected quilombos. With these data in hand, the government can devise evidence-based policies to meet the needs and uphold the rights of people of African descent.

Everyone counts – so let's count everyone!

In advancing UNFPA's work, the expertise, dedication and leadership of our staff count, too. And I am pleased to welcome Julia Bunting as the Director of the new UNFPA Programme Division, which will be fully operational in August. Julia brings a wealth of experience on our normative, policy and programmatic work, and I am certain that, together with our committed, hard-working staff, she will lead UNFPA's programme work to new heights.

I extend my profound thanks to Julitta Onabanjo, who led the Technical Division through an important historical period, and to Arthur Erken, Director of the Programme and Strategy Division, who was instrumental in orchestrating the success of the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25. I know that their vision, strategic thinking and deep commitment will bear fruit in their exciting new roles.

With gratitude, we say goodbye to Leanne Kinsella, who will complete her term as UNFPA Ethics Advisor in June.

Finally, I welcome Elena Pirondini to her first Executive Board session as the new Chief of our Executive Board Branch.

Humanitarian Action

Mr. President,

A few weeks ago, while visiting Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, I noted with concern that the population of Rohingya people stranded in the camps there had doubled to more than one million since my last visit in 2018, alongside the Secretary-General. As is always the case, the preponderance of victims are women and girls.

In one of the 56 UNFPA women-friendly spaces, women told me that they now feel more empowered to speak out against the sexual crimes they suffered, and they know how to access services and support.

I also saw first-hand how the skills of trained midwives save lives. Last year alone, UNFPA and our partners facilitated more than 10,000 safe births in the Rohingya camps and host communities.

Yet despite these positive signs, funding shortfalls and increased insecurity continue to put the lives of these women and girls at risk. Their plight is just one of many crises that have fallen from the headlines. We must not forget them.

UNFPA continues to strengthen our capacity to deliver in humanitarian settings. In an era of escalating humanitarian need, we know this is essential to accelerate progress towards the three zeros: zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths and zero gender-based violence.

Last year alone, in 51 countries facing humanitarian crises, UNFPA reached 14.4 million people with sexual and reproductive health services and nearly 6 million with gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response services.

From Haiti to Ukraine to Yemen and beyond, over 3,600 [thirty-six hundred] health facilities were supported to provide life-saving care. Women and girls sought physical and emotional refuge in 1,700 [seventeen hundred] safe spaces.

UNFPA supported the deployment of hundreds of trained midwives to drought-affected parts of Ethiopia.

In Afghanistan, community midwives in 360 UNFPA-supported family health houses are the only health-care providers in remote regions.

In Sudan, where famine looms, our mobile teams are providing supplies and building capacity for maternal health, including emergency obstetric care, and for the clinical management of rape.

In Gaza, women give birth under appalling conditions each and every day. Thanks to our extraordinary staff on the ground, UNFPA has delivered reproductive health kits to enable safe births for more than 20,000 women since the crisis began.

Hundreds of UNFPA-trained midwives in Gaza are supporting pregnant women, new mothers and their newborns unable to access a functioning health clinic or hospital. When possible, we have also distributed hygiene supplies, diapers, baby clothes, blankets and other essential items to thousands of new mothers. Yet all of this constitutes the most meagre support in an ocean of need. We join our Secretary-General in calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

UNFPA's emergency preparedness, anticipatory action and prepositioning of supplies are increasingly integrated into regular operations to ensure efficient humanitarian response.

Cash and voucher assistance has emerged as a critical operational tool in complex emergencies. In 2023, UNFPA provided \$6 million US dollars in cash or vouchers to more than 150,000 people across 25 countries.

This assistance complements the large-scale cash programmes of agencies such as the World Food Programme and the International Organization for Migration, with a focus on leaving no one behind and ensuring that women's and girls' specific needs are taken into account.

Oversight

Mr. President, Distinguished Board Members,

Across all facets of UNFPA programmes and operations in all settings, my senior management team and I remain unwavering in our commitment to upholding the highest standards of accountability and transparency. We therefore welcome the annual reports of the Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS), the Independent Evaluation Office, the Ethics Office and the Oversight Advisory Committee.

UNFPA values the constructive guidance provided by OAIS and its acknowledgment of the organization's dedication to advancing governance, risk management and control processes. We work closely with OAIS and related oversight bodies to address areas of concern.

May I note that in 2023, UNFPA reinforced our oversight functions, and allocated an additional US\$2.1 million dollars from unspent balances in accordance with the revised Resource Management Policy.

Further, the current Integrated Budget ending 2025 includes a US\$2.7 million dollar increase for OAIS to support 11 temporary positions.

Our UNFPA commitment to accountability, transparency and oversight includes the continued strengthening of measures for protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

I have appointed dedicated professional staff to lead these efforts, and UNFPA now has developed a two-year PSEAH Strategy, prioritizing the eradication of sexual misconduct and the dignity and well-being of survivors. UNFPA insists that women and girls be recognized as experts in their own protection. They know the circumstances that put their safety at greatest risk and what the aid sector can do to tackle those risks.

UNFPA upholds zero-tolerance for any form of wrongdoing or abuse – racism, sexism, antisemitism, anti-Muslim sentiment, homophobia, any form of discrimination or hate speech – all are abhorrent, run counter to our core values, and have no place at UNFPA.

In our efforts to nurture a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability, I commend the Independent Ethics Office. It responded to over 300 requests for guidance last year and delivered training on such topics as psychological safety, use of social media, and ethical leadership. All of this work plays a key role in enhancing the trust in and the credibility of UNFPA, both internally and externally.

A strong evaluation function also remains a priority for UNFPA, as evidence-based decision-making and organizational learning are vital for accelerating progress on the three transformative results and enhancing learning and accountability.

We welcome the significant progress outlined in the 2023 annual report on evaluation and commend the embrace of innovation and digital approaches and the meaningful engagement of youth in evaluation.

We also welcome the formative evaluation of the organizational resilience of UNFPA in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which provides valuable lessons for preparing, adapting, and responding to future global crises.

UN reform

Mr. President,

Six years into the current United Nations reform, UNFPA continues to make important contributions to the design and implementation of the repositioned UN development system, as acknowledged in the evaluation on UNFPA engagement in reform efforts presented to this Executive Board last year.

The Summit of the Future in September presents a pivotal opportunity to reaffirm the need for a renewed, effective and inclusive multilateral system, with a strong, fit-for-purpose United Nations at its core.

Our hope is that the Summit of the Future and the upcoming negotiations on the 2024 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review will build on the outcomes of the 2023 SDG Summit and the ICPD30 review, reinforcing the need for accelerated efforts to achieve sustainable development, gender equality and human rights for all – and prosperity for future generations.

The Political Declaration adopted at the 57th Session of the Commission on Population and Development in April shows that with political will and patient determination it is possible to bridge diverse perspectives. We hope that this spirit of cooperation and consensus-building will only grow and inform future negotiations – recognizing that our common objective is to improve the lives of women and girls, wherever they are.

HQ Optimization

Mr. President, Distinguished Executive Board Members,

Getting back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals will require the UN system to rethink, refocus, and recharge itself in line with the Secretary-General's vision for a UN 2.0 [two point oh'] – a UN system that is better equipped around data, innovation, digitalization, foresight and behavioral science to deliver integrated solutions to 21st century challenges.

In this context and in line with other UN organizations, UNFPA is transforming itself to make sure that it is optimally positioned to deliver in a constantly evolving world. As you know, we have prioritized the integration of the Policy and Strategy Division and Technical Division into the new Programme Division, to be largely based in Nairobi, where the Independent Evaluation Office will also be relocated.

The arrangement entails a new, future-fit structure, designed and configured based on analyses and staff input to ensure enhanced organizational performance and results.

Nine months in, I am very pleased to report that implementation is proceeding within the foreseen timeline.

Almost one year ahead of the move to Nairobi, the overall internal placement rate for staff in the professional category is 95.5% and for all impacted staff, including General Service staff, it is 92%. Our efforts aim to bring these numbers as close to 100% as possible continue, consistent with the human-centric approach that has informed the entire optimization exercise.

We are taking deliberate steps to fill any potential staffing gaps and ensure business continuity with minimal disruptions.

The Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Plan acknowledges the importance of further enhancing UNFPA's normative role, especially at the country level, so essential for delivery on our mandate.

The integration of programme and technical functions and the closer proximity of the new Programme Division to the field will strengthen the support country and regional offices receive and allow them to more effectively perform their normative roles. It will also strengthen the linkages between global norm-setting decisions and action on the ground.

The robust teams who remain in New York lead our global normative work. That work will continue to be accorded the highest priority, given the aggressive pushback that we face in practically every sphere of our lifesaving work. UNFPA will never take our eye off the ball on this crucial aspect of our work.

While cost reduction was not the primary driver of these organizational changes, the relocation is expected to yield significant financial benefits for UNFPA. From 2026 onwards, we estimate ongoing operational cost savings from staff-related costs, travel, and rentals at around US\$3 million dollars per year.

We expect to fully recover the move-related one-time costs of just under US\$10 million dollars in a little over three years, to be covered through existing resources. Clearly, this is a very prudent investment for UNFPA, in line with expectations from the Board.

We also expect that the comprehensive realignment undertaken by our Supply Chain Management Unit in 2023, which entailed structural, functional and cultural changes, will position UNFPA to play the lead role expected from the organization in the sexual and reproductive health space in development and humanitarian contexts.

Mr. President,

With respect to funding, I am most pleased to report that UNFPA surpassed the US\$1 billion dollar mark for the seventh year in a row, with total funding of over US\$1.4 billion dollars in 2023.

While we surpassed the Strategic Plan funding target by about US\$215 million dollars, lamentably core resources fell from 30% of total resources in 2022 to 27% in 2023.

Overall, non-core funding remained stable at just over US\$1 billion dollars. Contributions to thematic funds declined by 30% from the year prior, although we saw growth in funding from international financial institutions (IFIs) and from the private sector.

In 2023, UNFPA received US\$52 million dollars from a growing number of governments in partnership with a growing number of IFIs, sharply up from US\$38 million dollars in 2022. These include the African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, and the World Bank.

This increase is the result of enhanced support to country offices and increased engagement across all levels of the organization with a growing number of financial institutions.

I am also very proud of the growth in UNFPA funding from foundations, including a US\$100 million dollar commitment from the Gates Foundation, and another large contribution from the Children's Investment Fund Foundation is in the works.

We also saw growth in funding via other UN entities, predominantly from pooled funds at the country-level, showing UNFPA's commitment to UN coordination and active engagement in UN country teams.

After five years of significant growth, humanitarian funding remained largely unchanged last year, now representing 43% of non-core funding, or US\$443 million dollars.

Unfortunately, UNFPA expects further declines in core funding in 2024/2025. As a result, core projections are proposed to be reduced in the Mid-term Review of the Integrated Budget.

The decline in core and thematic funding reduces our flexibility, creating fragmentation and additional administrative burdens. This can impact our efficiency and effectiveness in adapting and responding to the needs of women and girls in a rapidly changing world.

Core contributions are most critical to UNFPA's normative and advocacy work, which lays the foundation for accelerated progress in advancing sexual and reproductive health, rights and choices for all.

On behalf of UNFPA and the 10-year-old girl who is the object of our labours, I thank all our partners for their generous support. Without it, how could we deliver our life-saving services to women and girls in need?

In appreciation, UNFPA works hard to enhance donor visibility. Last year, our top donors received well over 2,000 mentions across our social media channels, which represented a 92% increase over the year prior, and we continue to improve these efforts.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

To close, I am proud of the way our UNFPA teams around the world deliver in the face of daunting challenges.

On mission to Bangladesh a few weeks ago, I travelled by helicopter to the remote Santal community, one of the largest ethnic minority groups in the country. Women in the rural Santal community face significant barriers in accessing health services, and UNFPA set out to change this through a midwifery-led care model.

I met with three young midwives trained with UNFPA support – the first-ever in their community – heroes in pink saris beaming with pride.

The fact that they grew up there and speak the language puts them in a unique position to combat misperceptions about women's health and challenge negative social and gender norms. Since the project began in 2020, births assisted by skilled attendants increased 7-fold, and they haven't lost a mother yet. Indeed, many of the mothers, grateful that UNFPA helped them deliver safely, wanted us to meet their babies. And we met baby number 1, baby 300 and baby 400! Baby number 494 arrived during my visit – a bouncing, beautiful, healthy baby girl!

These transformational changes in community after community and our investments in women and girls add up. This is something that all of us, including the Board, should be proud of.

We at UNFPA are cognizant of the fact that we need to do much more and faster to reach the three zeros. The Mid-term Review and UNFPA evaluations offer ample evidence to guide our acceleration efforts.

Climate resilience was high on the agenda at the SIDS4 Conference in Antigua and Barbuda last week, where I reaffirmed UNFPA support to small island developing states. UNFPA tailors its support to middle-income, least developed and landlocked developing countries. We stand ready to support the implementation of the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS), including through provision of geospatial data to identify and reach vulnerable communities.

This is all part and parcel of our efforts to strengthen our humanitarian-development-peace nexus capacity to meet increasing demands for emergency response and resilience-building and to leave no one behind.

We continue to strengthen our analytical and foresight capacities and to close data and evidence gaps. We need to be able to identify emerging trends and threats and to plan and adapt accordingly, so that we keep moving forward. In a world of rapid demographic, climate and technological change, UNFPA faces a choice: be swept up by the current or chart our own course towards the future.

Mr. President,

In keeping with our practice of bringing voices directly from the field into our Executive Board sessions, I now turn the floor over to Susana Sottoli, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, to tell us about some of UNFPA's activities in the region.

[Susana speaks for 4 minutes]

Muchísimas gracias, Susana.

Mr. President, Distinguished Executive Board members,

We have seen what can be accomplished when we work together. We've done it before, and we can do it again. UNFPA looks forward to your active partnership, support and guidance as we continue the journey forward – together.

Thank you.

Closing remarks

Mr. President, Distinguished Executive Board members,

In the words of the great Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore (Tag-or): “Reach high, for stars lie hidden within you. Dream deep, for every dream precedes the goal.”

From Cairo in 1994 to Nairobi in 2019, to this year's ICPD30 dialogues in Cotonou, Dhaka and soon New York, the message is clear: We must not wait another 30 years to fulfil the promise of the Cairo ICPD!

The dream endures. Our work goes on. The march continues to a world of rights and choices for all.