

World Population Day, 11 July 2017

Family Planning: Empowering People, Developing Nations

Speech by

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Your Excellency Vice President U Myint Swe,
Your Excellency U Thein Swe, Union Minister for Labour, Immigration and Population,
Ministers and Senior Government Officials from related ministry,
Mrs. Janet Jackson, Representative of UNFPA
Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Mingalabar, Good morning. I would like to extend very warm greetings to all of you in this commemoration ceremony of 2017 World Population Day with the theme of “Family Planning: Empowering People, Developing Nations”. Being part of this commemorative event brings special warmth to me today. I was personally privileged to have been involved UNFPA staff member in 1994, when 179 nations agreed on a far-reaching agenda for population, including reproductive health rights, through the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. This is an agenda for all women and girls, men and boys, young people – as individuals, couples and families. I am heartened to seeing it being embraced through today’s event for people in this beautiful country at this important juncture in Myanmar history.

Thanks to voluntary family planning, millions of women in Myanmar today are empowered to make a choice in the number of children they want the spacing of their children, and to start their families when they wish including later in life. This gives them an opportunity to complete their schooling, earn a better living, enjoy sexual health and be free of unplanned pregnancy. In so doing, many women in Myanmar can avoid the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy-related death, and escape the trap of poverty. Investments in family planning create a reinforcing cycle of empowerment, which supports healthy, educated and economically productive women and families, propelling national

development forward. Family planning and empowering women are integral to all effective responses and investments, especially in development, in humanitarian emergencies and in conflict.

Today, half of married women in Myanmar practice family planning. Still, when asked, one in six married women report that they have an unmet need for contraceptives. This means that although they would like to, 1.3 million married women cannot access modern methods of contraception. When women cannot access contraceptives, it leads to unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and maternal and infant death, and it limits women's participation in the productive economy and career choices. Today, 8 women die every day due to pregnancy-related causes, and 2 of these are under the age of 25. Most of these deaths are avoidable.

Thanks to data from the 2014 census, we now know that about half of women are in the formal work force. We also know that some 2800 women die needlessly every year from pregnancy related causes. . A quarter of these – some 700 women – are young women who have not yet turned 25. It is also estimated that 246,000 abortions take place in Myanmar every year. Many of these abortions are performed under unsafe conditions, and women are dying as a consequence. At the same time, too many girls marry and become mothers at too young an age. Almost 300,000 teenage girls in Myanmar are already married, and 89,000 of these have already given birth. This is not good either for their physical development nor for their overall wellbeing. Women and girls need to know their and be able to make choices that affect their futures.

This year's World Population Day coincides with the London Family Planning Summit. The summit brings together the stakeholders of the FP2020 initiative, and it will be attended today by His Excellency Dr Myint Htwe, Union Minister for Health and Sports. Here in Myanmar, the Government of Myanmar and UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, are supporting the London Summit by organizing an FP2020 panel debate as part of today's programme.

Myanmar's commitment to the Family Planning 2020 initiative is to reach a modern contraceptive prevalence rate of 60 per cent, and to reduce unmet need for family planning to below 10 per cent by 2020. This commitment is part of the global FP2020 movement, which aims to expand access to voluntary family planning to 120 million more women around the world by 2020. We trust that this commitment

will be manifested through increased allocations of the national budget towards reproductive health services, including family planning.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development has marked a paradigm shift in the field of population and development, replacing a demographically driven population control approach with one that is based on the rights of individuals and couples to enjoy sexuality health and decide freely whether or when to start a family, and to choose the family planning methods they wish.

The right to exercise voluntary family planning is a human right and an integral part of the Sustainable Development Goals, including target 3.7 to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health services.

The rights based approach recognizes that people are actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of services. Informing, educating and empowering women and couples is essential. Their participation is central, not only to ensure they have ownership over factors affecting their own lives, but also to sustain progress nationally.

Excellencies and invited guests,

Over the past five years, Myanmar, with the support of the UN and other partners, has made impressive progress towards expanding access to voluntary family planning and reproductive health

Guided by the 2030 Agenda, UNFPA works with the Government and other partners to bring family planning options to those women in Myanmar whose needs are greatest. These are the women who want modern contraceptives, but cannot access them due to barriers such as cost, supply, logistics and cultural norms.

From 2014 to 2016, UNFPA provided family planning, and life-saving maternal and reproductive health commodities worth US\$9.6 million, and invested US\$1.4 million into a new logistics management system that has improved efficiency in commodity distribution, and tracks where supplies are being used

and how they are being used. This contributed significantly to the Myanmar's national achievement where, in 2016 alone, access to modern contraceptives and the availability of lifesaving medicines for mothers helped avert 1.3 million unintended pregnancies and 1,000 maternal deaths.

Excellencies, Distinguished guests,

Let us continue to work together to ensure that all women in Myanmar, no matter who they are or where they are, have access to a full range of contraceptive options on an equal basis, so that no one is left behind.

Providing women and girls with access to contraception is transformational. It empowers people to shape their own lives, it makes families healthier, and it helps lift entire countries out of poverty. Women with full access to family planning choices are healthier, better educated, and more empowered to seek and keep better jobs, making their families better-off financially. Their children are healthier too and receive better education, helping to trigger a virtuous cycle of prosperity and wellbeing that carries well into future generations.

Expanding access to family planning options is one of the most cost-effective ways to break the cycle of poverty. It empowers people to plan their futures and reach their fullest potential. Still, preventing an unintended pregnancy remains an unsurmountable obstacle for 1.3 million married women here in Myanmar, as well as for many unmarried women, including young women. This threatens their ability to build a better future for themselves, their families and their country.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we are facing a critical moment that could define the trajectory of the next generation. Over the next few years, the success of family planning programmes that reach all women in Myanmar may be a deciding factor between poverty and prosperity for the entire country. UNFPA and the UN family is committed to work with the Government and all other partners to help meet the aspirations of women and families in Myanmar.

Now is the time to renew our commitment and investments to ensure that Myanmar will developing safer, healthier and more resilient way for the benefit of all people of this most beautiful and special country.

Thank you for your attention.