

# Press Release



United Nations Population Fund  
Office for the Pacific

## **Message of Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director of UNFPA On the occasion of the International Day of Families 15 May 2006**

Today, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, joins people around the world in commemorating the International Day of Families. The theme of this year's observance, *Changing Families: Challenges and Opportunities*, points to the dramatic changes that families are undergoing in all regions of the world.

One of the most dramatic transformations is urbanization. Today, nearly half of all people live in cities compared to less than 15 per cent a century ago. The numbers of children attending school, especially girls, has risen and, as a result, there are more and more women participating in the formal workforce. Furthermore, evidence shows that the increase in female employment has been a major driving force of global economic growth and poverty reduction. It is no surprise that leaders at the 2005 World Summit declared "progress for women is progress for all."

Progress for women and their families has been the primary focus of UNFPA since its inception. When women are educated and healthy, and able to make their own choices, they do what is best for themselves and their families. They usually choose to have fewer children and invest more in the health and education of each child. Improved health, education and employment opportunities for women encourage savings and economic growth, which help nations fight poverty. Also important are family-friendly policies that help parents balance work and home responsibilities, and equitable relations within families. All over the world, expanding opportunities have prompted many young women to delay marriage to later ages. But progress remains uneven. To this day, millions of girls continue to be married when they are children denied the ordinary experiences that young people elsewhere take for granted: schooling, good health, economic opportunities and friendship with peers.

Today, UNFPA calls on communities and nations to actively discourage child marriage and to promote secondary education, gender equality and economic opportunities for young women and men. UNFPA also calls on governments to increase investments in sexual and reproductive health. Today, millions of children are orphaned each year because their mothers die from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, or from AIDS. Surely, we can do better. Many lives could be saved, and families strengthened, if the international goal of universal access to reproductive health were achieved.

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