



**Remarks by Honorable Dr. Jiko Luveni
UNFPA Pacific High Level Champion
Suva, Fiji
17 February 2015**

Honourable Members of Parliament

Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Regional Partners and United Nations Agencies Representatives

Students, who are here as Representatives of Young Persons

Civil Society Representatives and Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

When the United Nations Population Fund Pacific Sub-Regional Office asked me to consider being a High-Level Champion for their mandate areas, I accepted it with a deep sense of responsibility. The mandate areas the UNFPA was given by the United Nations General Assembly includes some of the most socially and culturally sensitive areas of our lives, but they are also development areas very close to my heart.

It was with a sense of urgency as well that I accepted this role. We are living in a time and age in which lived realities of individuals are very different from those of our parents and even our time of youth: our children and grandchildren are growing up so very fast, and I do not just mean physically. The accessibility of information via the internet and mobile

telephone networks has been both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because ever-advancing technology has contributed immensely to development efforts of countries like Fiji and other Pacific Islands nations but a curse because we cannot control everything it disseminates, no matter how much we try.

The negative impact of these information highways is another reason why it makes sense to take a proactive approach as I have pledged to do, through this platform as the UNFPA Pacific High-level Champion. The people in our communities, villages, provinces and however else we are grouped, especially our children and young people, must hear facts from us, not the internet. And they must hear it before they develop practices that we may never be able to wean from them. Leaders, whether heads of faith-based groups, state or traditional leaders, we are all collectively responsible for the dissemination of **correct** and **timely** information on issues around sexual and reproductive health and rights; the dynamics of gender equality and maternal health or how and the benefits of planning the number of children we have according to what we can afford, and the medical benefit of spacing children.

We have to be compassionate and care enough to speak frankly to our children and youth. Socio-cultural status quo that used to prevent a discussion between children and parents of topics like why condoms will not only prevent unplanned pregnancies but can also protect you from a HIV infection, must begin from home. We need our adolescent girls to understand that having an unplanned baby means she may not become the dentist that she has potential to be. We need our young men to understand that an unplanned pregnancy is a responsibility that he may not

be able to deal with psychologically or financially. We owe our youth, especially adolescent girls, the opportunity to reach their full potential. We must strive towards ensuring that every pregnancy is wanted and that every woman must be able to enjoy a safe childbirth: that women continue to die giving life is one of life's most cruel ironies.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is critical that Fiji, as a member of the global community makes true its commitments to international instruments or development frameworks like the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development or ICPD, or the recent Samoa Pathway, the Outcome of the Third International Conference of Small Island Developing States in 2014. I am therefore very proud that the Constitution of the Republic of Fiji specifies **reproductive health care** under its Bill of Rights, specifically under the Right to Health. Fiji also has a **Reproductive Health Policy** and we should soon have a policy that will cover family planning services and guidelines. UNFPA Pacific was instrumental in this latter initiative, funding nurses from around the country to participate at the consultation phase. As a significant regional player, Fiji was also a signatory to the *Moana Declaration*, a united stand of Pacific Parliamentarians for Population and Development issues in 2013, recognizing in particular the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights as an integral part of national development. This role is therefore not just personal anymore, but very much in-line with Fiji's international, regional and national commitments.

There is a community of stakeholders if you will, who believe that addressing population and development issues are fundamental for progress. Apart from the United Nations, the civil society and the private

sector, the participation of the media sector is crucial. The media plays a very important role in the dissemination of correct and timely information to the populace. Policy makers and legislators can ensure legal frameworks are in place and the relevant ministries can provide services but if people are not informed or aware of such services, all will be in vain. I urge the management and personnel in the media industry to take development issues on, as a corporate responsibility. I understand the pull of stories that will sell newspapers or increase listenership but I am also acknowledging the media's reach. The Guardian now has an entire section on development but it has not taken away the value of the Guardian as a global leader. In fact, if you visit it online, it reflects a serious corporate commitment to ensuring information is available to the mass.

As we prepare for the global endorsement and the roll-out of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we must put people back into the core of such development agendas. Sustainable development can only be achieved at national level if as individuals or as basic units of society, that is our families, are at the centre of these initiatives. As peoples of *moana* and I appeal to you especially my fellow Fijians: we must provide our young people a holistic beginning in life, and critical to this will be people and leaders who do not shy away from addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights issues.

Ladies and gentlemen, Fiji has led in many initiatives related to the UNFPA mandate areas – it remains the only country in the Pacific with an ageing policy. Fiji has also led in the implementation of a more holistic family life curriculum. And we can also lead, working with regional and international stakeholders to deliver a nation where every pregnancy is wanted, a region

where every childbirth is safe and a world where every young person's potential is fulfilled.

I thank you most sincerely for joining us for this announcement.