



**Remarks by Dr Laurent Zessler  
UNFPA Pacific Sub-Regional Office Director and Representative  
Suva, Fiji  
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Madam Speaker and Honourable Members of Parliament

Members of the Diplomatic Corp

Regional Partners and Colleagues from Sister United Nations Agencies

Students, Teachers and Civil Society Representatives

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

As the head of the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, Pacific Sub-Regional Office, I warmly welcome you all to this gathering, for the announcement of the **UNFPA Pacific High-Level Champion**.

- In 1994, a fundamental shift in the way we considered population issues occurred when 180 world leaders endorsed the International Conference on Population and Development or ICPD, Programme of Action. We began to consider population and development issues from a human rights' perspective instead of looking purely at statistics and its implications. The Programme of Action was a 20-year development agenda which has since guided the work of the United Nations Population Fund, the UNFPA. We are therefore all eagerly

awaiting the endorsement and roll out of the Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs, from this year, 2015.

- The Programme of Action specifies that the responsibilities of ongoing and future demands by a large young population fell on families, local communities, countries and the international community. Principal of these responsibilities was ensuring that every child is wanted. The document called for countries to ensure the special needs of adolescents were met and that all adolescents, particularly young women, were encouraged to complete their education to increase their potential for a better life, as remaining in school helped prevent early marriages and high-risk child-bearing.
- Reproductive rights and reproductive health is defined as: a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system, its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a safe and satisfying sex life, that couple have the capacity to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Governments were encouraged to ensure that policies and services were conducive for people to be able to enjoy reproductive rights; specifically, comprehensive and correct information and a full range of health-care services, including family planning, which were accessible, affordable, acceptable and convenient to all users.
- Three years ago, the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, conducted a global assessment of how the Programme of Action had been implemented by Governments. Among other things, the Pacific Regional ICPD Review found that an integrated and comprehensive

approach to achieving reproductive rights and sexual and reproductive health across the region was yet to be established, that full and equal participation of women in island nations' political and economic life remained elusive and the report affirmed the prevalence of gender-based violence across Pacific countries.

- To champion or advocate for a particular issue, one would have to sincerely believe in the cause. To champion an issue is to believe in the potential change for the better.
- The UNFPA Pacific Sub-Regional Office had worked with the Madam Speaker previously as head of a ministry that we, as a development agency, worked with closely. The Madam Speaker had been an exemplary ambassador for her country at national, regional and the international meetings. Many of you may not be aware that the Madam Speaker is also a former United Nations Population Fund staff member.
- It is to our advantage that she had not lost her personal interest and commitment to the various mandate areas of the UNFPA – from reproductive health issues to those surrounding violence against women. In her position as the first woman Speaker of the House of Representatives in Fiji, Dr Jiko Luveni is in a position to convince her contemporaries that fundamental to all other development initiatives, is the need to address population-related issues. We see in Dr Luveni an articulate and passionate advocate for behavior-change in sexual and reproductive health and rights-related issues. Dr Luveni was unanimously voted to her position and we have absolute faith in her ability to work across political affiliation, ethnicity and faith. In her capacity as the UNFPA Pacific High-Level Champion, Dr Luveni will

also be involved in global and regional engagements; she will also be involved in our work towards achieving the Samoa Pathway, which is the 2014 Outcome Statement of the Third Conference of the Small Island Developing States in Samoa, and our work towards achieving the **Family Planning 2020** project goal, that by then, 2020, 120 million more women in the world will have access contraceptives and information about planning their family. Some parliaments in the region do not have population and development committees anymore; we consider these committees critical for an effective response by legislators to population and development issues and hope that Dr Luveni would be able to positively influence a revamp of such committees across the region.

- Ladies and gentlemen, we also look to you as representatives of various constituencies, as colleagues from the development sector and as the Fourth Estate, to work with Dr Luveni and the UNFPA Pacific staff in making a positive difference in people's lives. It goes without saying that we are humbled and very appreciative of the fact that the first woman to be the Speaker of the House of Representatives in Fiji, Dr Jiko Luveni has graciously accepted to be the UNFPA Pacific High-level Champion.

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