



Pacific Sub-Regional Office

Remarks by Kate Gilmore, Deputy Executive Director (Programme)

Ladies and Gentleman, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Friends and Colleagues from Civil Society, from the Diplomatic Corps, our treasured partners and great allies in the struggle for fundamental human rights of women, men, young people, adolescents and children: it's such an honour to be here among you for these next few days.

The Cairo Plan of Action, articulated by the international community of nations in 1994, set us a powerful course of action and transformation with which Pacific Island communities, among others, have grappled ever since and, on many fronts, have surely achieved remarkable success. In these past two decades much has been done, advocated and led through the region's parliaments and converting into government policy; supported by the activism of civil society; uplifted through the community of churches and by those of faith; efforts that have been dedicated to addressing the most fundamental longing that each and every human being can live in dignity, live in peace and live in security.

Over the course of the last 20 years the progress for women, young people in particular in the Pacific has been remarkable and yet, as we've heard so powerfully this morning from His Excellency the President of Fiji, there is still so much more to be done. Rates of preventable maternal mortality are not where they need to be. Access to the support, information and commodities we need to ensure women can choose when to have children, and how many to have, are not at the levels that the people of the Pacific want. Sexually transmitted diseases afflict thousands of often very young people, while gender based violence, early marriage and early pregnancy combine to deny adolescent girls the opportunities – which only completing secondary and continued education provide.

If we are to advance – across the region - universal access to these fundamental dignities, which as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Right, are ours by birthright, then we need focused courageous leadership that insists on respect for and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all Pacific Islanders. It is how to best move this agenda forward, to better achieve the MDGs and, better influence the post-MDGs development story: that is the purpose of this conversation that brings us here and which we will share with you over the coming days, and through you, with the peoples of the Pacific Islands.

These are uncertain times. Your communities, perhaps more than any other communities around the world, sit not only on the frontlines of that uncertainty but at its very frontiers. Across your countries and deep into your communities, you are uncovering and discovering, wrangling with, inventing and creating inclusive anticipatory responses to some of the greatest challenges that the world will face in the coming decades. Climate instability is perhaps the most confronting example, bringing with it the

challenges of widespread migration out of country; widespread urbanization within country; and widespread change in the expectations and aspirations of the region's youth. These are today's frontier issues, for which many of our policy tools and instruments are not yet well equipped. Their solutions are demanding the best of our creativity and the most powerful of our innovations. Solutions to these regional population and development challenges need strong and committed community and political leadership and, because they require multi-sectoral responses, these solutions also require strong partnership. We just have to work together, in partnership, across our differences, in all our diversity and using our pluralism as our strength.

For the United Nations Population Fund, the facilitation of this meeting's exchange of insights, of hopes and of aspiration is central to our Pacific contribution and thus also key to our hopes for the post-2015 development agenda. For, when at the end of 2015, the current MDGs have run their initial course, there will be much work to be done still.

And, as the global community narrates the future direction and priorities for the next decades' sustainable and inclusive development, it is critical to ask: whose voice is being heard? And, whose perspective is being brought to the tables of power and decision-making? The United Nations Population Fund, with its offices and presence in more than 140 countries, is working around the world, in partnership with the community of nations, to ensure that the future development agenda is derived from powerful, inclusive and regionally relevant conversations. This is the only way in which a platform of intelligence can be formed on which can be built a global development agenda for 2016 and beyond that is relevant, inclusive and effective. Without the voices of the Pacific Islands active in that global articulation, the post-2015 agenda will be less effective, less credible and less relevant and we cannot afford that. In the decades ahead, the vibrancy and the specificities of the Pacific Island communities will be essential to the integrity of the global development agenda locally and more broadly. And now is the time for us to secure that integrity.

At the heart of that global development agenda must be a simple proposition: that there is but one purpose only of sustainable development and that is to uphold the inherent dignity of people. There is no development, worthy of the name, that creates and broadens the gap between rich and poor; that facilitates and enables chasms of division between the powerful and the powerless. There is no development agenda that can claim to have integrity and authenticity if it leaves young people behind; if it ignores the specificities of women's experience; if it fails to speak to the poor and if it does not offer hope, reconciliation and a pathway forward to greater equality between and deeper dignity for all.

At the heart of that newly people-centred development agenda, therefore, must be a set of global promises and national commitments that engage our mentality, spirituality, physicality and our sexuality. After all, these are the unique dimensions of the humanness and the dimensions that make each of us each unique. The new development agenda must engage these human dimensions with creativity: Our mentality must be nurtured and strengthened through education and exercised well in productive dignifying employment. Our spirituality must be fostered through ethical leadership and through respect for freedoms of belief and expression, in all our diversities. Our physicality must be protected by securities of peace, food and health. Our sexuality must be turned from a source of shame

and blame to a cause for respect, through priority for investment in our sexual and reproductive health. These are the aspects of the human condition that the development agenda must care for, uphold, direct investment towards. It happens too that these elements will then equip our peoples, and outfit our communities, with exactly what they need to be resilient in the face of the changes that are coming, whether it is change from climate instability, economic volatility or political uncertainty.

We talk often of resilience as an environmental agenda and indeed it is. We note the importance of resilience in economic terms and that's key. We understand a resilient planet is essential to the future of the earth and we know we have to change human behaviour to secure that. However, each of these dimensions of resilience depends on an even more foundational resilience and that is the resilient individual. That resilient person is one who is equipped through education; made safe from violence and exploitation thorough the rule of law; entitled to active participation in decision-making through parliamentary democracies; empowered through information and upheld in their physical and mental integrity through fulfillment of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. That is the foundational proposition of the Cairo Plan of Action – that a person enabled and supported to live in dignity is one whose resources, competencies, creativity and capacity are fully available to their communities so that – as community members - they become part of solutions in the face of challenges rather than being part of the challenge to which some governments feel there is no solution.

And at the heart of that community resilience, as His Excellency has described so powerfully, sits the young person and specifically, the adolescent. It is their future that we are deciding when we talk about development and it is their future that is the world's future. You will hear over these coming days many words spoken but they will be very few compared to the multiple reams of MDG related documents, words exchanged, language drafted and resolutions passed that clog the United Nations systems as the international community struggles to join up the sustainable development goals to the post-millennium development goals. But it is possible to put the challenge in a most simple form: Tomorrow is today aged 10 and it's a girl: If we change the life of that 10-year-old girl, we will change the world.

Thank you.

Kate Gilmore
Deputy Executive Director – Programmes
UNFPA