



**SPEECH BY THE UNFPA PACIFIC DIRECTOR AND REPRESENTATIVE, DR LAURENT ZESSLER  
2014 LAUNCH OF THE STATE OF WORLD POPULATION REPORT  
FA'ONELUA CONVENTION CENTRE, NUKU'ALOFA, TONGA  
NOVEMBER 18, 2014  
[As prepared for delivery]**

- **Your Royal Highness Crown Princess Sinitakala Tuku'aho,**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**
- **WHO Liaison Officer Dr Li Dan and Distinguished Delegates,**
- **The Members of the Clergy,**
- **Chief Executive of Health Dr Siale Akau'ola,**
- **Chief Executive, Senior Officials,**
- **A particularly warm greeting to all the young people with us today.**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is indeed an honor to stand in your presence this afternoon as the Representative of the United Nations Population Fund, the UNFPA, for the Pacific region. The UNFPA is truly grateful, and we thank you sincerely for your willingness to host the Pacific launch of our flagship report, the *State of World Population*. Every year, the United Nations Population Fund releases this report with a particular focus area. The 2014 report is entitled *The Power of 1.8 Billion: Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future*.

In the Pacific, the United Nations Population Fund works with 14 United Nations member states in the areas of maternal health, population and development, ageing, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality and reproductive rights, data for development and of course, youth. Our regional support is varied and cuts across sectors.

May I at this juncture commend the work and the commitment we have received from Tonga; the revamping of the Parliamentarian committee that looks specifically at population and development is just one example of your commitment, like hosting this Pacific launch.

**Ladies and gentlemen**, three years ago, the United Nations Population Fund conducted a global survey to assess progress of the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development, the ICPD, Programme of Action. This 20-year Programme of Action was endorsed by 179 countries in 1994, and has guided the work of the United Nations Population Fund since.

From the survey, governments of the Pacific region noted what worked, what didn't and suggested priorities, moving forward. Two of their four recommendations included assured access to sexual and reproductive health services, and capacity-building for youth divisions in government ministries. Governments listed **8** future

priorities which included increased youth participation in decision-making, a reduction in the high rates of sexually-transmitted infections, addressing teenage pregnancies, strengthening youth programmes, and updating youth policies.

**Ladies and gentlemen**, there is neither lack of commitment from regional leaders nor lack of acknowledgement of the consequences of not investing in critical areas like sexual and reproductive health. The report that is to be launched in a few minutes by Her Royal Highness Crown Princess confirms there are now 1.8 billion adolescents and youth in the world today. Never before have there been so many young people and we may never again experience such enormous potential for progress.

One of the most sustainable approaches to equipping youth to face the future with confidence and resilience is by securing a **demographic dividend**. This is a time in a country's history when the number of people in the workforce is more than dependents, who are usually children and older people. When this occurs, nations have a lot more resources at their disposal for economic development.

Today, countries with the largest proportion of youth are among the poorest but they are also on the cusp of transition that can yield this dividend. Taking advantage of a dividend depends on public

policy choices and investments. Most countries for example still need to ensure that their commitments to international agreement that protect the rights of young people are reflected in their national laws, policies and regulations.

**Ladies and gentlemen**, a global survey in 2013 in 176 United Nations member states and seven territories found that those in early stages of transition are generally doing well in policies critical to the creation of this dividend. The survey affirmed progress on many levels for example, how young people are being included more in policy agendas. However achievements lag behind commitments because many policies and strategies lack full funding for implementation.

In the Pacific, there is a need to be strategic about our investment in youth, today.

**Ladies and gentlemen**, the international community has agreed to ground the post-2015 development agenda in **respect for human rights, equality and sustainability**. This global development agenda will replace the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 and beyond. However these principles of human rights, equality and sustainability cannot be realized without the full participation of young people.

A demographic dividend brings economic wealth but it must be used to achieve inclusive growth and offer opportunities and well-being for all. A young person of 10 in 2015 will be an adult of 25 in 2030, the target year for achieving the next generation of sustainable development goals.

UNFPA believes that the success of the international community's next big push for sustainable development, particularly for us in this region, depends on how well we support youth today.

I thank you.