

**Statement on the Occasion of World Population Day 2009**  
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Today, as we commemorate World Population Day, the global financial and economic crisis threatens to reverse hard-won gains in education and health in developing countries. Among those hardest hit are women and girls. This is why the theme of this year's World Population Day focuses on investing in women. Even before the crisis, women and girls represented the majority of the world's poor. Now they are falling deeper into poverty and face increased health risks, especially if they are pregnant.

Today, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are leading killers of women in the developing world. And maternal mortality represents the largest health inequity in the world. This health gap will only deepen unless we increase social investments, maintain health gains and expand efforts to save more women's lives.

In countries and communities where women have access to reproductive health services—such as family planning, skilled attendance at birth and emergency obstetric and neonatal care—survival rates are high and maternal and newborn deaths are rare.

Access to reproductive health, in particular family planning and maternal health services, helps women and girls avoid unwanted or early pregnancy, unsafe abortions, as well as pregnancy-related disabilities. This means that women stay healthier, are more productive, and have more opportunities for education, training and employment, which, in turn, benefits entire families, communities and nations.

And investments in reproductive health are cost-effective. An investment in contraceptive services can be recouped four times over—and sometimes dramatically more over the long-term—by reducing the need for public spending on health, education and other social services.

It is estimated that family planning alone could reduce the number of maternal deaths by as much as 40 per cent.

Our world today is too complex and interconnected to see problems in isolation of each other. When a mother dies, when an orphan child does not get the food or education he needs, when a young girl grows into a life without opportunities, the consequences extend beyond the existence of these individuals. They diminish the society as a whole and lessen chances for peace, prosperity and stability.

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, remains committed to supporting countries to advance women's empowerment, gender equality and sexual and reproductive health.

Today, on World Population Day, I call on all leaders to make the health and rights of women a political and development priority. Investing in women and girls will set the stage not only for economic recovery, but also for long-term economic growth that reduces inequity and poverty. There is no smarter investment in troubled times.

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