

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD POPULATION DAY

11 July 2016

The international community has committed to a new sustainable development agenda built on the principles of equity and human rights. A central objective of the Sustainable Development Goals is to leave no one behind.

Despite significant gains made in reducing poverty and improving opportunity and well-being for many people around the world, hundreds of millions remain desperate for a chance of a better future. Among those least served by previous development initiatives are girls, particularly those in their formative teenage years.

Just when girls should be in school and imagining the possibilities ahead, too many are held back from pursuing their ambitions by social and cultural traps. While a boy's options and opportunities tend to expand when he becomes an adolescent, those of a girl too often shrink. Half of all sexual assaults worldwide are committed against girls aged 15 or younger. In developing countries, one in three girls is married before she reaches 18. And teenage girls are less likely than teenage boys to start or finish secondary school.

Rectifying these inequalities is critical for the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That is why it includes the specific Goal of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. On this World Population Day, I urge all Governments, businesses and civil society to support and invest in teenage girls. Everyone deserves the benefits of economic growth and social progress. Let us work together to ensure a life of security, dignity and opportunity for all.