

Message on the occasion of International Women's Day: Beijing at 20

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8 March 2015

During the past 20 years, we have witnessed remarkable advances in promoting the human rights and dignity of women and girls and their full and equal participation in society.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing bolstered progress for women's rights to make their own choices about their bodies and their futures.

For the first time, world leaders proclaimed sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as human rights integral to gender equality and women's dignity and empowerment. These rights are essential for the enjoyment of other fundamental rights, for eradicating poverty and for achieving social justice and sustainable development.

Today, on International Women's Day, we celebrate the progress we have made. And, we pledge to redouble efforts to complete these unfinished agendas. We will not stop until we cross the finish line and realize equality between girls and boys and women and men.

Together, we have come a long way. Today, more girls are going to school, more women have joined the labour force, and more women have access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning.

More women are in national parliaments. More women are playing a role in advancing peace and security.

Maternal death has been cut in half and there is increased action to protect the health and rights of adolescent girls, a long overlooked population.

Global campaigns against female genital mutilation and child marriage are gaining momentum. We also see a growing global movement to end gender-based violence, and more boys and men promoting gender equality.

Yet, while these trends hold great promise, overall progress has been unacceptably slow, with stagnation and even regression in some contexts.

No country in the world has achieved gender equality, and discrimination in the law persists in many countries. Women's rising education attainment and workforce participation have not been matched with equal prospects for advancement and equal pay.

And everywhere, violence against women and girls continues to take a devastating toll.

We can no longer allow violence to strike one in three women worldwide, as it does now.

We cannot allow 15 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 to be subjected to genital mutilation between now and 2030.

We cannot allow one in three girls to be married before reaching age 18.

We cannot allow more than 800 women to die every day from complications of pregnancy and childbirth.

And, we cannot allow 225 million women to live without access to modern contraception.

These human rights violations must end!

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, we must close the gaps for women and girls, and address them within the framework of the new development agenda.

Sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are essential to sustainable development and must be at the centre of this new universal agenda.

When a woman can exercise her reproductive rights, she is better able to enjoy other freedoms and opportunities—from education to employment to full participation.

Last year, more than 120 world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action to improve the lives of people, particularly women and girls, and protect our planet.

During the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women, we look to the world's leaders to commit to stronger action and the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action for progress for the world's women and girls, and for all of humanity.

Today, on International Women's Day and every day, UNFPA will continue to provide strong support for the rights of women and girls, gender equality and universal sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

The future we want is a world where every woman and girl can live free from discrimination and violence, and enjoy her full human rights and human dignity.
