

# United Nations Population Award Presentation Ceremony

## *A Celebration of Courage*

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Madam Deputy Secretary General, Executive Director of the UNFPA, Chairman of the Committee for the United Nations Population Award, Professor Huang, representing the Federation of Reproductive Health Associations of Malaysia,

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests and Friends,

I am deeply honored and humbled by this award, the citation and the remarks by the Deputy Secretary General. These are special and unexpected gifts. In turn, I celebrate colleagues whose courageous, often iconoclastic, ideas and actions have, and are, moving the world toward sexual and reproductive rights and health for all.

I begin by saluting the women and girls, in villages and poor urban areas across Africa, Asia and Latin America, who have educated and inspired me during my 45-year journey in the population field. They are our lodestar.

We have accomplished a great deal. Access to modern contraceptives, development of emergency contraception and female condoms, as well as improved techniques for induced abortion, have enabled countless women to make their own decisions about childbearing. In the last 20 years, increased access to skilled care during childbirth, along with contraception and safe abortion, have reduced by half the number of global deaths related to pregnancy and delivery.

As important, the field of demography now includes research on the complexities of women's lives, research that guides the design of policies

and programs increasingly responsive to women. Of the many demographers with whom I have worked, I celebrate this evening two feminists: Harriet Presser and Ruth Dixon-Mueller.

Research such as theirs helped us realize that the human rights of women must be central to our work and that a package of sexual and reproductive health services must be available to everyone: younger and older, married and unmarried, and particularly the disadvantaged.

Just two months ago in this building, demographic data about young people also helped to persuade the United Nations Commission on Population and Development, the CPD, to recognize the human right of adolescents and youth to have control over their sexuality, and access to the comprehensive sexuality education and health services they urgently need.

New allies have joined us, including Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, many UN diplomats here this evening, parliamentarians, heads of government, and leaders in the human rights and the HIV and AIDS communities.

Our accomplishments, our allies and this year's historic CPD resolution give us much cause for celebration, and also challenge us to accomplish more.

Hundreds of millions of women, and over one billion adolescents, have yet to benefit from the sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights promises made at the path-breaking 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the ICPD.

Further, some countries face reactions against these promises. In the United States, powerful forces, in and outside of our government, are attempting to undo legal abortion and prevent universal contraceptive coverage.

Women in Turkey are courageously confronting their government's actions to rescind the 1983 law allowing abortion as well as reductions in access to free contraception.

As we face such challenges, I celebrate women and men with whom I have worked, who led the way to, and continue to work for, the historic 1994 ICPD and subsequent, agreements.

One of the earliest such leaders was John D. Rockefeller 3<sup>rd</sup>. He sowed seeds for the ICPD at the 1974 World Population Conference, when he urged the world to put women's equality, empowerment and human rights at the center of population policy.

By the 1980's, women in Africa, Asia and Latin America were initiating women's health and rights organizations, exemplified by DAWN, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era. This Global South network of feminist activists, organizers and researchers envisioned, and are still pursuing, a more just world, free of prejudices and inequalities based on class, race and gender. They and countless other courageous women have worked tirelessly, in their countries, for health services based on women's empowerment and human rights.

For example, in Brazil and Indonesia, women advocates, such as Maria Jose Araujo and Ninuk Widyanoro, worked with leading male physicians, such as Anibal Faundes and Dr. Sudraji, to secure policies and programs that would guarantee women's and young people's access to a package of services including voluntary contraception, respectful maternity care, safe abortion, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and supportive counseling. Their work, though not yet finished, provides powerful examples today for ICPD implementation.

When HIV and AIDS became known in the 1980s, the International Women's Health Coalition, IWHC, where I worked for nearly three decades, brought an international alliance of women together with Population Council staff, Chris Elias and David Phillips, to pioneer work on microbicides. Today, we are getting closer to a product that will protect against sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and against unwanted pregnancy.

In 1990, Mahmoud Fathalla, Director of the World Health Organization's Special Programme of Research on Human Reproduction and recipient of

the 2009 Population Award, invited IWHC to help forge common ground between contraceptive researchers and women's health and rights advocates. The many results include sustained attention to women's perspectives on contraceptive safety and acceptability, and technical and policy guidance on access to safe abortion, accomplishments spearheaded by WHO staff, particularly Jane Cottingham. Another WHO staff, Claudia Garcia Moreno, has generated unprecedented and invaluable, multi-country research on violence against women.

Also in 1990, at the Population Council, led by George Zeidenstein and George Brown, Judith Bruce designed a practical, rights-based framework for ensuring quality of care in national family planning programs. This framework remains an essential tool today.

These efforts, and others, provided grounding for the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. Exceptional women leaders with whom I was, and am, privileged to work defined the issues to be addressed. They include, among many others, from A to Z: Bella Abzug, Mabel Bianco, Charlotte Bunch, Gloria Careaga, Frescia Carrasco, Ellen Chesler, Amparo Claro, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Sonia Correa, Joan Dunlop, Esther Endale, Monique Essed-Fernandez, Pinar Ilkkaracan, Brigid Inder, Barbara Klugman, Bene Madunagu, Ellen Marshall, Wanda Nowicka, Jacqueline Pitanguy, Margaret Pollack, Gita Sen, Mona Zulficar ...

Achieving the ICPD agreements also required courageous new thinking and actions by official leaders, including Nicholas Biegman, Nafis Sadik, Fred Sai, Mervat Telawi and Tim Wirth. With women activists, they ensured that the ICPD reached consensus on the shifts in population policy that women proposed.

Since the ICPD, governments, non-governmental organizations, the United Nations system and many donors have adopted the ICPD vision. For instance, at the initiative of the Secretary of Health, with input from national feminists, particularly Rounaq Jahan, Bangladesh added obstetric care and other services to their national family planning program, a change that facilitated dramatic reductions in maternal and neonatal mortality.

The Netherlands, the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom and the United States, US foundations and UNFPA all provided, and provide today, essential funding and political support for advocacy by women and for using the ICPD approach in national population and health policies and services.

Since January, 2011, UNFPA's Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin has been a galvanizing ally. In this time of resource shortages and ideological opposition, he consistently reminds us all that, "ICPD is about human beings, respect, rights, and what we can do to ensure that every individual can make his or her own decisions."

As we move forward together to fulfill ICPD's promises, we are challenged to ensure that:

- Our every action upholds human rights,
- Our strategies prioritize equity in access and outcomes, especially for women and adolescents, and
- Our services achieve the highest attainable quality and guarantee freedom of choice.

Fortunately, we have determined, capable leaders, among whom I recognize the International Women's Health Coalition and their outstanding new President, Francoise Girard.

As important, a new generation of knowledgeable and skilled feminist activists has mobilized to guide us, exemplified by the international network, RESURJ, and by new members of DAWN. Let us listen to and work closely with them as we raise the funding and political will that countries and UNFPA need to fully implement the ICPD, and as we work to ensure that the ICPD agreements have a central place in the 2015 United Nation's review of the Millennium Development Goals and in new development frameworks that may emerge.

Each of us has a vital contribution to make and some days will seem particularly hard. But we will never give up.

I leave you, in Eleanor Roosevelt's words, "with the certain knowledge that there is no more liberating, no more exhilarating experience than to ... act boldly" to secure every woman's right to a just and healthy life.

Thank you so much for being here this evening and for all the work you have done and will do. The award honors us all.