

UNITED NATIONS



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**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON WORLD POPULATION DAY**

**11 July 2004**

This year's observance of World Population Day coincides with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, and thus offers an opportunity to reflect on the progress that has been made since that landmark event.

Ten years ago in Cairo, 179 governments agreed that population issues must be addressed if development policies are to succeed. They agreed that population issues are not just a matter of numbers; they are first and foremost about people – about human beings and their inherent right to development and to lead a decent life no matter where they happen to be born. And they agreed that women's empowerment and gender equality, and the elimination of violence against women and girls, are cornerstones of population and development policies.

During the past decade, the Cairo Programme of Action has guided governments in their efforts to address population dynamics and movements, to increase access to education and reproductive health services, and to empower women to participate more fully in society, as is their fundamental human right. The broad results are clear: many people now enjoy increased longevity, reduced mortality, and broader life choices and opportunities. Yet too many people have yet to experience such gains. Greater commitment and action are urgently needed, especially when it comes to promoting women's rights and increasing investments in education and health, including reproductive health and family planning.

This World Population Day marks the mid-point of the 20-year Cairo Programme of Action. Let us today reaffirm our commitment to the promises made in Cairo. And let us recognize the centrality of the ICPD agenda to our wider efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.