

Key note address by Kate Gilmore, UNFPA Deputy Executive Director

It truly is an honor to be with you on this significant occasion – a thrill for UNFPA, a vital reflection of our longstanding partnership with Bulgaria and of the importance to us all of these issues that we will consider over these few days.

Your Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, dear friends, we stand together – together at the beginning.

At the beginning of the beginning of this most welcome opportunity consider together some of the most critical intersections between people, population and development.

But, we stand also at the starting gates of a much longer journey – a major shift – a course altering change - in global development. For, and over, the course of the coming decade or more – a major shift will take place in this principled, but ultimately practical, human progress project that we call “development”.

It is true - and we should celebrate that – that over the past 20 years, nearly 1 billion people have risen out of poverty. A majority of countries has achieved gender parity in primary education. Preventable maternal deaths have fallen by almost half. More women have entered the paid workforce. Globally, greater choices for women around the world have seen fertility fall by 23 per cent while infant mortality has declined by more than 30%.

These are among the remarkable achievements of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) period and these establish incontrovertible evidence that positive change is possible, doable, affordable and sustainable.

But this welcome progress hides a troubling truth - that the fruits of development's gains have been neither fair, nor just or distributed evenly.

Gapping inequalities mean millions of people are denied access to the fruit of human progress. Today, 70 per cent of people live in countries where the gap between the rich and poor has deepened and broadened over the course of the MDGs.

At the same time, our futures hold new challenges: age and household structures are changing; urbanization and migration are growing; we have greater access to and use of information and yet more surveillance intruding on our privacy; climate instability seems more common - what ever its origins, while more intense polarization is evident in public discourse.

How are we to chart our course across this tough terrain?

The 2000 UN Millennium Summit was the largest ever gathering of world leaders and it entrusted to governments and other development actors the world over, the Millennium Development Goals. In other words, it narrated a common story of human progress. 15 years later, it falls to our generation to redefine, renew and rename that narrative.

People the world over are thinking about these same questions, whether or not they have heard of the post 2015 process! They are asking themselves what is the future they want for themselves, their families and their children's children! The post-2015 process did not cause people to grapple with this question of the future of human progress, but it has attempted to capture it, and it does aspire to influence it.

And in this very human world, whose trajectory is to be shaped by the successors to the MDGs – the new sustainable development agenda, the data are a storyteller irrefutable.

Whatever the targets set or goals are finally agreed - the post-2015 period will be a story of **more people on the move** than ever before, both within and across national borders.

A story too of **more people living out their lives in urban and peri-urban**, rather than rural, spaces - for the first time in human history, with the city itself emerging as a major site for development effort. The number and size of cities has boomed – mega cities – larger than many countries – have grown 10 fold since the ‘70s and by 2030, 80% will be in the developing world.

And the “bookends” to this time period addressed by the post-2015 agenda?

When the period to be covered by the SDGs comes to its close, the world will be home to the **largest generation of older people in human history**.

Without parallel in human history — in the twenty-first century, population ageing is pervasive, a global and enduring phenomenon with profound implications for many facets of human life - affecting every woman man, and child — we will not return to the young populations that our ancestors knew.

Yet, at the outset of the SDGs – at its departure point – where we stand today - is a world that houses **the largest generation of young people ever in human history** - Totaling more than 1.8 billion young people – were young people to share a common sovereignty – were they a country – they would form a country much greater in size than India.

Just by sheer scale alone, age will likely join gender and ethnicity to be perhaps this century's most pivotal and thus likely contested identities.

These then are the greatest demographic transition the world has ever seen and it comes to us – with all its opportunity and challenge - in a period of resource scarcity and economic austerity.

These unprecedented population shifts, occurring as they do against the backdrop of uncertainty, fragility and non-linear change, challenge the very methodologies and techniques of social and political development policy, programmes and tools – challenge our underlying assumptions about human progress.

If these next few decades are indeed to pave the way to a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable world, then it is clear that we must be open to new ways of thinking, new ways of working, new ways of cooperating.

Albert Einstein said that the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing and expect a different result. There are critical things that we just must do differently if we are to bring about a new result.

The key difference is that we must commit to a more person-centered approach to the world's development agenda. Without people, enabled and supported, through the realization of their rights to, for example, health and education, they will not function optimally. Without optimal functioning they will not realize their full potential. Without their fuller potential realized, their capacities to be productive, engaged and constructive contributors to the sustainability and resilience of their communities and economies is undermined.

It is why we must engage more directly, empower effectively and enable more comprehensively the greatest asset of our age – that most critical of human capital – those who today are adolescent.

Yes, the needs of an adolescent are significant: for schooling and higher education; for meaningful employment; safe homes; for protection from violence, exploitation, and exclusion; and for sexual and reproductive health, regardless of identity or status. Meeting these needs would be among the most efficient and effective investments that governments could make for economic development, as the East Asia economic growth trajectory testifies.

However, underpinning their needs – more far reaching than needs alone- being central to clear assignment of responsibilities for the meeting of needs and to engagement of young people – our partners – as agents of the change we seek to redress needs – are their rights.

Indeed, if we dig down into the root causes of impediments to development, excavate the determinants, needs are revealed to be sourced in rights - rights delayed, rights denied, or rights destroyed. The solutions too lie with rights - in rights upheld, protected, exercised and fulfilled.

In 1993, Vienna Conference on Human Rights tore down a “berlin wall” of ideological division between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights – affirming both the universality of rights and the indivisibility – their mutual interdependence. These values are at the heart of the SDG agenda – whose uniqueness lies in its universal application and its integration of challenges across people, polity, profit and planet.

In 1994, just a year after Vienna, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development affirmed that people are at the heart of development and human rights are at the heart people. The Cairo Programme of Action – decided by 179 UN Member States – sets out that even the most intimate of places and the most

intimate of acts have human rights implications – human rights from the court room to the bed room.

In 1995, Beijing Women’s Conference took those Vienna and Cairo commitments – promises resoundingly made by member states - and said with acclamation that women’s rights are human rights and human rights are women’s rights.

Today, these are the global standards to which we are obliged, by Member States to adhere: standards for the protection of the interests of all people, not only some – inclusive thus of those matters which concern women and young people most particularly.

It is why family planning must be based on choices from among modern methods; why comprehensive education on sexual behavior and health over the period of schooling is not a luxury item but required, it being so central to empowerment for self-understanding and informed choices by both boys and girls;

It is why to subject a little girl to a so-called marriage or union is not a marriage under international law – it being neither freely formed nor grounded in consent; it is why we must intervene where teenage pregnancy occurs - 90% of which happens in marriage or union – a child bearing a child! And, it is why we are obliged to reject sexual violence and to seek rather its eradication.

With rights as our normative standard, medical ethics as our guide star and medical science as our knowledge base, there can be no acceptable basis in policy, law or practice, for discrimination or stigma in accessing quality health care. Equality of access to quality of care is the standard to which all providers must be made accountable.

And in this agenda there are frontiers yet to be forged - in which we are lagging behind at cost to the lives of those who are least privileged, most stigmatized and have fewest choices.

As the ICPD Beyond 2014 review confirmed:

- Unsafe abortion is still a leading causes of maternal death and injuries and yet entirely preventable – Its burden is disproportionately born by the adolescent girl and the evidence is clear that the path to reducing rates of recourse to abortion is to legalise it, remove stigma from it and make it safe. Nonetheless, WHO’s technical and policy guidelines for access to safe abortion, available since 2003, have been widely underutilized or ignored.
- As the relevant 2013 WHO report conveys, intimate partner violence (IPV) and non-partner sexual violence affects 1 in 3 women worldwide, most often at the hands of their intimate partners
- Meanwhile, STIs other than HIV are among the most neglected dimensions of SRHR, despite their harmful consequences for women (e.g., compromised fertility, pain), for pregnancy (miscarriage) and for neonates (preterm births, low birth weight, congenital defects such as blindness). Annual numbers of bacterial STIs have risen over the life of the MDGs particularly in women aged 49 and over, while HIV incidence has declined for every age group except the adolescent, again a burden disproportionately born by the girl.

Our confinement of concern for sexuality-related health to the reproductive health years and our silencing of the “S” word in sexual and reproductive health may comfort our discomfort but it comes at a harsh price - extracted in lives lost and potential unrealized. Two age groups suffer most gravely – those over the age of 49 – specifically women – for whom rates of STIs have increased most steeply and

those aged between 10 to 15 about whom – despite the marked decrease in the age of onset of puberty – we know the least because with respect to them we don't even collect the data.

Sustainable development is a peopled-project – a matter inexorably therefore of human rights and of rights upheld. Human rights: that which cannot be granted to us, because they cannot be taken from us; human rights for the best of us and for the worst of us.

And it is young people themselves who are providing the strongest leadership of this insight, reminding us that they want, need and, critically, have the right to, the assets, space, support and freedom to make informed decisions about all things affecting them – from their bodies to their futures.

Dear colleagues, let us be very clear, the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people are natural, real and pressing but the genesis of our failure to meet those needs lies neither in random misfortune nor just in their risk taking. It is the product of decisions of the non-young – decisions taken by adults - that cause rights to be derailed:

"We live in a decaying age. Young people no longer respect their parents. They are rude and impatient. They frequently inhabit taverns and have no self control."

Well, that's how one adult put it 6000 years ago – a quote found on the wall of an Egyptian tomb. Throughout time, it seems, adult amnesia has served to entrench the human suffering that young people undergo.

Adult denial of emergent sexuality in adolescence clouds our ability to engage constructively with this critical human development period during which a person become themselves – in which we all became ourselves – sexual, gendered,

talented, personalized, individualized - selves – as indeed we all did, in all our diversity. Perversely, it is adult exploitation and abuse of that same emerging identity which is the untold story sitting behind much of child marriage, sexual violence and human trafficking.

Globally, our double standards further beleaguer progress: Young women are too young to have access sexual and reproductive health care, yet old enough to be married? Old enough to be pregnant, yet not old enough to be trusted with access to sexuality education or to contraceptives? Old enough to catch an STI but not old enough to seek and receive treatment for it? Too young to vote, yet old enough to be a parent?

And yet, the evidence is clear that investment in young peoples’ rights is our key to unlocking inequalities, eradicating poverty, securing security and plain essential for justice, resilience and inclusion.

Globally, this is an era of deficits – or so it seems. Deficits are evident across numerous currencies – only some of which are monetary in nature. Among the more troubling, is the sense that many share, of deficits in leadership. Having studied what makes for its opposite - namely greatness in leadership – economist and social theorist John Kenneth Galbraith observed the key characteristic of great leadership to be “the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time.”

Impatient with injustice, wanting conclusive eradication of preventable human suffering, seeking redress of unconscionable inequality, fearful of myriad fundamentalisms’ cruel extremes, living with the consequences of a planet and a climate under duress: people the world over are anxious.

From Venezuela to Tunis to Cairo to Hong Kong but against the backdrop too of Baghdad, Bangui, Juba, Gaza and Damascus – people are acting in, on and against their worlds – worlds marred by exclusion and by alienation, by claim and counter claim.

And they are doing so frequently beyond the immediate reach of their formal representatives, or politics' institutions or our familiar channels for social engagement. Instead, they are amplifying their voices through social media and social organizing; telling their own stories about what matters, about what is right and wrong; intervening sometimes creatively and sometimes destructively, to assert, to express, to discover, to rebuild; acting for good and, in some instances, acting for hate.

Leadership of an anxious people requires that we place people, diverse in expression, different in location, but equal in value at the center of the new development agenda. After all, people are not development's problem: they are development's purpose. People are not just development's end: they are its central means.

Some one has said that great stories happen to those who can tell them. The MDGs told a new story – a story of global collaboration for hope, commitment and delivery. Their successor - the post-2015 sustainable development narrative – and our leadership of it - must tell an even newer story of development - a story with people more squarely at its centre – a story of people as partners in development with human rights our standard and the conclusive erosion of inequality our primary purpose. A story in which no one is left behind because no one has been left out. Human rights: for each of us; to the exclusion of none of us; in the interests of all of us. /ends