



UNFPA Liberia Launches  
State of World  
Population 2017

17 October

## **“A Girl Who Has Been Forced Into Early Marriage and Childbearing May Never Have the Opportunity to Shape Her Future” .... Says Mr. Farid Zarif, SRSG & Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia**

Liberia joined the global launch of the State of World Population 2017 on 17 October with the call for unrestricted space for women and girls to enjoy full sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Mr. Zarif said a girl who has been forced into early marriage and childbearing may never have the opportunity to shape her future. “She cannot go to school anymore; pursue more

gainful employment or chase her dreams but rather becomes a slave of circumstances determined by others for her;” he said.

“The right to choose is the most important thing which is denied women and girls by many societies. The inability of women and girls to make their own sexual and reproductive health choices robs them of their futures;” said Mr. Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, when he launched the report entitled, “Worlds Apart: Reproductive Health and Rights in an Age of Inequality.”



***Mr. Farid Zarif, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (Center)***

He made reference to a woman whom he was introduced to in Liberia who became grandmother at the age of 26. This woman who is now 36 years old, gave birth to a girl when she was between the ages of 12 and 13; and the daughter also married and had her first child around that same age. "Look at the implications of the inability to exercise the right to make the choice. Everything that could have lied ahead of her in terms of shaping the future has been robbed of her. That denial of her right becomes a vicious cycle that will captivate and enslave her for the rest of her life;" Mr. Zarif said.

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of the United Nations in Liberia said reproductive health and rights is the gamut of all issues that is part and parcel of the Sustainable Development agenda.

He called on the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other UN agencies to work together; especially in Liberia to address the issues as highlighted by the report. "Failure to do this, we are bound to face the consequences;" Mr. Zarif said.

In remarks, Dr. Oluremi Sogunro, UNFPA Liberia Representative said UNFPA is committed to working with other United Nations agencies, partners and governments to ensure a "future where zero is

the only acceptable number;" including zero maternal deaths, zero unintended pregnancies and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and child marriage.

"UNFPA, therefore, calls today for action on multiple fronts to tackle all forms of inequality of sexual reproductive health and rights from the root, laying the foundation for an alternative--equitable--future. A future where all women govern their own lives with equal access to sexual and reproductive health care, where they are free from unintended pregnancies;" Dr. Sogunro said



***UNFPA Liberia Representative  
Dr. Oluremi Sogunro***

"A future where all women, men, girls and boys may understand and enjoy their rights and have the knowledge and the power to set their own course in life is what we need;" He added.

Dr. Sogunro said 1 in 3 women and girls of reproductive age in Liberia wants to stop or delay

childbearing and are not using any method of contraception. "An unintended pregnancy can set in motion a lifetime of missed opportunities and unrealized potential, trapping a woman and her children in an endless cycle of poverty. The economic slide can continue for generations;" he said.

According to Worlds Apart--the 2017 UNFPA State of World Population report-- "unless inequality is urgently tackled and the poorest women empowered to make their own decisions about their lives, countries could face unrest and threats to peace and to their development goals."

The report says, in most developing countries, the poorest women have the fewest options for family planning, the least access to antenatal care and are most likely to give birth without the assistance of a doctor or midwife.

"Limited access to family planning translates into 89 million unintended pregnancies and 48 million abortions in developing countries annually. This does not only harm women's health, but also restricts their ability to join or stay in the paid labour force and move towards financial independence," the report argues.

It maintains that lack of access to related services, such as affordable child care, also stops women from seeking jobs outside the home. For women

who are in the labour force, the absence of paid maternity leave and employers' discrimination against those who become pregnant amount to a motherhood penalty, forcing many women to choose between a career and parenthood.

The report warns that the costs of inequalities, including in sexual and reproductive health and rights, could extend to the entire Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It also states that failure to provide reproductive health services, including family planning, to the poorest women can weaken economies and sabotage progress towards the number one sustainable development goal, to eliminate poverty.

The UNFPA report recommends focusing on the furthest behind first, in line with the United Nations blueprint for achieving sustainable development and inclusive societies by 2030. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has "envisaged a better future, one where we collectively tear down the barriers and correct disparities," the report states. "Reducing all inequalities needs to be the aim. Some of the most powerful contributions can come from realizing...women's reproductive rights."

## 10 ACTIONS FOR A MORE EQUAL WORLD OUTLINED BY SWOP 2017 REPORT

- **Meet all commitments and obligations** to human rights agreed in international treaties and conventions;
- **Tear down barriers**—whether discriminatory laws, norms, or service gaps—that prevent adolescent girls and young women from accessing sexual and reproductive health information and services;
- **Reach the poorest women** with essential, life-saving pregnancy and maternal health care;
- **Meet all unmet demand for family planning**, prioritizing women in the poorest 40 per cent of households;
- **Provide a universal social protection floor**, offering basic income security and covering essential services, including maternity-related benefits and support;
- **Bolster services** such as childcare to enable women to enter or remain in the paid labour force;
- **Adopt progressive policies** aimed at accelerated income growth among the poorest 40 percent, including through-stepped-up human capital investments in girls and women;
- **Eliminate economic, social and geographical obstacles** to girls' access to secondary and high education, and to the enrollment in courses in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics;
- **Accelerate the transition** from informal jobs to formal, decent work, focusing first on sectors with large concentration of poor, female workers, and unblocked women's access to credit and property ownership; and
- **Work towards measuring all dimension of inequality** and how they influence each other, and strengthen links between data and public policy.