15:05–15:10
Remarks by UNFPA Deputy Executive Director Ms. Laura Londén

Your Excellencies Presidents of the Executive Boards, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

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Today we are witnessing the world’s largest generation of young people, around 1.8 billion strong. They have the full potential to jumpstart economic growth and spur innovation needed for a sustainable future.

The world, young people are growing up in, is fast changing and has seen tangible progress: fewer women are dying in pregnancy and childbirth; skilled birth attendance has increased worldwide; more women have access to education, work and political participation; more children are going to school, and fewer adolescent girls are having babies.

But this progress does not tell the whole story: the outlined successes are not reaching everyone equally. In the poorest communities, women’s status, maternal death, child marriage, have seen very little progress in the last 20 years, and, in fact, in some instances are being reversed. Young people and adolescent girls, in particular, are at risk in the poorest communities. More girls are finishing primary school, but they are facing challenges in accessing and completing secondary education. This is problematic for everyone because young girls – if provided with education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and employment opportunities – can support higher economic growth and development.

While much is changing around young people’s lives to the positive, the likelihood of an adolescent girl becoming a mother is about the same as in previous decades. Worldwide, an estimated 16 million 15–19 year-olds give birth each year. What seems to be an overall stagnation
is a glaring case of inequality, with the decline in developed countries more than four times faster than in developing regions.

For an adolescent girl who becomes a mother, the change affects her own life chances and those of her children. A cycle of poverty may result from her increased health risks, lower her prospects of pursuing an education and cause difficulty in earning a living.

Young people are also disproportionately affected by disaster and crisis: today, 40 per cent of the 1.4 billion people living in countries impacted by crises are under the age of 15.

In spite of all of these challenges, young people, including adolescents, are extremely resilient and resourceful. Their dynamism and energy are essential assets to become active and important agents of positive change and able to drive the development and -in settings of crisis- the reconstruction- of their communities. Their active engagement and voice is key to implementing effective and sustainable programs. When young people, including adolescents, are empowered and supported, they have a unique power to reduce intergenerational poverty and ultimately create the prospects of a demographic dividend of inclusive and durable economic growth.

It is therefore essential to prioritize young people in programming. Development plans and efforts must safeguard the human rights and invest in the capabilities of young people, including in quality education, effective livelihood skills, and access to sexual reproductive health and rights, so that every young person has knowledge, skills and opportunities for a healthy and productive life. Removing barriers and promoting universal access to youth-friendly health information, services and commodities, and providing comprehensive sexuality education, are essential to enable young people grow up safely, have a healthy adolescence, delay childbearing and acquire the education and skills needed to lead long, healthy lives, and contribute productively to a sustainable future.

Reaching young people during early adolescence is critical—the right decisions made during this period can help avoid adverse health and development outcomes at the level of the young person her- or himself, the community and society at large.

Benefits of investment in education, especially secondary education, are equally high. An extra year of education for girls boosts their future wages by 10–20 per cent. Moreover, the positive
effect of girls’ education carries over to future generations, resulting in improved health outcomes for women, their children, and their grandchildren.

But most of all, we need to recognize and engage young people as important allies in the design and implementation of our programmes.

"Nothing for us without us" - the young people tell us loud and clear. UNFPA therefore partners with young people in more than 150 countries and territories around the world to promote their participation and leadership, enabling them to overcome barriers, spearhead innovations and unleash their full potential.

Ladies and gentlemen

The ambitious goals for the world’s young people laid out in the SDG’s cannot be met in isolation. Consequently UNFPA joins hands with many partners. There are countless other examples of successful partnerships impacting the adolescent and youth agenda such as the Health 6 the Interagency Network of Youth Development, and through our successful collaboration with UNICEF to eradicate child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting. Together with partners, UNFPA advocated to ensure that young people, particularly adolescents, are now the focus of global health interventions as demonstrated by the Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health following the adoption of Agenda 2030.

The Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, which UNFPA launched with over 50 partners at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, is an unprecedented collective commitment to ensure that the priorities, needs and rights of young women and men, and girls and boys, affected by humanitarian crises are addressed, and that they are informed, consulted and meaningfully engaged throughout all stages of humanitarian action. Since its inception only a year ago, the Compact has sparked increased collaboration and synergies between humanitarian actors in terms of programming for young people. Common actions are underway such as the development of a guidance on engaging young people in humanitarian response and a capacity building workshop for young people in humanitarian action in the Middle East planned for November this year. Stay tuned for more updates on this rapidly moving partnership.

Also, UNFPA is proud to lead, together with the Peacebuilding Support Office, the Progress Study on Youth Peace and Security, mandated by the Security Council resolution 2250 (2015).
Finally - we need to measure better how well we do - only what gets measured gets done - that's why UNFPA, UNDP and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth co-convened an expert group meeting on "Measuring the state of youth in the Sustainable Development Goals", to support the possible establishment of a global instrument for measuring progress on youth development and well-being, tracking data over time against youth-relevant indicators that are contained in the global framework of Goal indicators. This work will help to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals in a way that both captures the experiences and views of youth and includes young people in processes that hold governments to account for these global commitments.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Partnering with and investing in the largest generation of adolescents and youth in the world's history is the most effective way to support developing countries faced with emerging challenges. It will help consolidate the historic global gains achieved in early and middle childhood, enjoy adolescence and prevent negative health and other consequences in adulthood.

Whether our programmes focus on sustainability, poverty reduction, social inclusiveness or economic growth, investing in the health and well-being of the world's young people is a necessary condition for success for all.

I thank you!