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UNFPA Executive Director Statement on International Women's Day

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Protecting Reproductive Rights of Rural Women. A Pathway to a More Equal World

The economic inequalities plaguing much of the world today are reinforced by many other forms of inequality, including inequalities in sexual and reproductive health. More than 200 million women—many of them poor and living in rural and remote parts of the world—lack access to voluntary family planning methods. In addition, more than 800 pregnant women—many in fragile socio-economic situations—die each day from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

In many parts of the world, access to services is particularly limited or even non-existent for rural and indigenous women, undermining their ability to exercise their reproductive rights.

Without addressing the discrimination that these women face in both private and public spheres, many of them will remain caught in a vicious cycle of poverty, repeated pregnancies, diminished capabilities, unfulfilled human rights and unrealized potential. The denial of reproductive rights not only harms individuals, it can also put a drag on economies and stifle countries' development.

Making reproductive health care universally accessible would not only help fulfil a poor, rural woman's reproductive rights; it would also enable her to stay healthy, get an education and participate in all facets of life, including economic life. These benefits accrue to her, her family and her country. That's why it is our mission at UNFPA to work with our partners to end unmet demand for family planning information and services, to end preventable maternal deaths, and to end gender-based violence and other harmful practices against women and girls by 2030.

Addressing inequalities and discrimination has always been at the heart of UNFPA's work. We work to ensure that no one is left behind through programmes that improve the lives of excluded and marginalized women.

On this International Women's Day, let us all renew our commitment to addressing the many different forms of inequalities that hold women back, particularly the rural and indigenous poor, and keep them from realizing their rights and ambitions, and from living their lives on an equal footing with men. A more equal world depends on it.

UNFPA GCC participates in commencing the Programme of Co-operation of WHO and Ministry of Health & Launching the National Policy on Prevention of NCDs



On 10th of February, Mr. Asr Toson- UNFPA GCC Representative & Mr. Salah Al-Saleh- UNFPA GCC Programme Analyst, participated in the event commencing the WHO-Oman Country Cooperation Strategy, 2018 - 2022, with Ministry of Health (MoH).

The strategy is focusing on five areas: communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases, mental health, substance abuse and disabilities, building on the achievements of the government by ensuring care throughout the life course, and by addressing the social determinants of health, strengthening the health system towards achieving universal health coverage, and supporting the national capacity to prevent, detect and respond to health emergencies. The strategy was developed in a participatory approach with the national stakeholders to respond to the needs of the government. The event was attended by the Minister of Health Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Al-Saidi; Dr. Akjema Magtymova, WHO Representative for Oman, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, and heads of UN agencies in Oman, as well as top officials at the Ministry of Health.

On other hand, UNFPA GCC Representative attended the launching of the National Policy and Multisectoral Plan on Prevention and Control of non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) on Monday, 12th of February, being a common national activity undertaken jointly by UNCT agencies in the country, including UNFPA. The ongoing NCDs initiative was initially launched in 2017 by the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases and MoH in Oman, which was reflected by several activities undertaken by UNFPA through its Y-Peer network members to promote healthy lifestyle under the MoH related work plan.

"This initiative is a significant joint work platform as non-communicable diseases, including cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes, chronic pulmonary diseases and cancer, among others, are the major cause of premature deaths worldwide, both in developed and developing countries," said Mr. Asr Toson, UNFPA GCC Representative.

A new Co-operation Plan discussed with OPCT addressing Elders related Activities



UNFPA is working to raise awareness about population ageing and the need to harness its opportunities and address its related challenges. And to ensure that seniors are fully engaged in the social life, and for UNFPA GCC to work on this important area of intervention, a meeting was held on Wednesday 21st of March at UNFPA GCC office in Muscat, with Oman Parents Care Team (OPCT), affiliated with the Omani Women Association.

The OPCT was represented by Ms. Jawkha bint Mohamed Al Farsi, President of the OPCT, who briefed UNFPA GCC staff about the activities undertaken by OPCT including supporting the healthcare services for seniors, developing public awareness about the importance of caring of older persons, providing psychological and emotional support to the seniors with special needs and their families, training Omani volunteers on seniors' healthcare methods by using "simulation" training approach, & providing reduced-prices healthcare equipment needed for palliative care for those in need.

This meeting came to recognize the efforts exerted by the OPCT in supporting this population group, and stress on the importance of providing the required healthcare to the older persons in this critical life stage.

The outcomes of the meeting were focusing on UNFPA GCC participation with OPCT's activities, through mobilizing the Y-Peer network members in future to partake in the social and fundraising events initiated by OPCT & creating a mechanism to support the "simulation-based" trainings of the Team. Undoubtedly that will help in achieving UNFPA vision in regard to preserving dignity, health and independence of the elders, and assisting in creating an ageing-friendly environment for them.



UNFPA GCC participates in a Forum to Build the Culture of Dialogue in the Region

On 13-14 of March 2018, Salah al-Saleh- UNFPA GCC Programme Analyst, took part in a Forum held by Naif Arab University for Security Sciences (NAUSS) in co-operation with the Technical Secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs titled "Support and Encourage a Culture of Dialogue", in Riyadh, KSA.

This forum was initiated by the University upon the Arab League's resolution No. 699/March 2017, which adopted the Arab Declaration to Support the Joint Arab Initiative to Combat Terrorism", and to implement the resolution issued by the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs in last November, which called for this initiative to be undertaken by the University.

This forum was attended by delegates from the Ministries of Social Affairs and Culture of the Arab countries, in addition to prominent academics and researchers in this field. The discussions aim at promoting the culture of peace and dialogue among youth in the region in order to eradicate extremism.

The forum resulted in multiple outcomes, including practical and viable solutions and programmes of actions to promote the culture of peace, understanding and dialogue among youth, by investing in several cultural and educational programmes. The recommendations also stressed on the importance of education being the main entry point to create a change in the Arab society and promote tolerance and critical way of thinking.



Masirah Island draws its Community Center Plan of Action for 2018–2021

Under its Annual Work Plan for 2017 and Oman Ministry of Health (MoH) strategy to promote for healthy life-style in the country, and based on the recommendations made by the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, UNFPA GCC provided technical assistance to the Department of the Community Based Initiatives (CBI) at the MoH, to develop a Qualitative Needs Assessment and 4 years Plan of Action (PoA) to establish the Island's Community Center.

The PoA, which was developed by UNFPA Consultant Ms. Rana Haddad, was finalized early this year and translated the findings of the conducted needs assessment. It also highlighted the values and preferences of Masirah community members, taking into account all the feedback and inputs of all the stakeholders on the Island in a participatory approach.

The PoA indicated the standards of the prospective Center, its mission, vision and guiding principles that are focused on providing the inhabitants with a better quality of life. The Plan pinpointed the beneficiaries of the center, and shed the light on the significance of such initiatives to youth in order to develop their skills and capacities and cater for the needs of other population groups. Moreover, the document provided a glance at the potential work strategies and organizational structure of the center, and the responsibilities of each management member, as well as the human resources and financial requirements for operation.

The provided needs assessment and PoA received the approval of the MoH and the respective CBI department, which is looking into the means of implementation in order to materialize this ambitious plan.



One of the focus group discussions to receive the inputs of the community stakeholders through the Needs Assessment Process.

JOINT STATEMENT UNFPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DR. NATALIA KANEM UNICEF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR HENRIETTA H. FORE On the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation 6 February 2018

A race against trends

Female genital mutilation is many things: A violent act that causes infection, disease, childbirth complications and even death. A cruel practice that inflicts lasting emotional harm and preys on the most vulnerable, least powerful members of society – girls between infancy and age 15. A violation of human rights that both reflects and perpetuates the low status of girls and women in too many places. A drag on the well-being of communities and economies.

Yet, it is also something that can be stopped.

Around the world, momentum to eliminate female genital mutilation is building. Political will, community engagement and targeted investment are changing practices and changing lives.

In countries where UNFPA and UNICEF work jointly to end female genital mutilation, girls are one third less likely to undergo this harmful practice today than they were in 1997. More than 25 million people in some 18,000 communities across 15 countries have publicly disavowed the practice since 2008. Globally, its prevalence has declined by nearly a quarter since around 2000.

This is good for girls and young women themselves; it is also good for their families and communities. Girls who are not subjected to the practice tend to grow up to be healthier and have healthier children. They are often better educated, earn higher incomes and are more empowered to make decisions about their own lives. Communities and countries that confront the harmful practice and commit to changing it reap commensurate benefits.

This is the good news. Yet, population trends in some of the world's poorest countries where female genital mutilation persists threaten to roll back our progress.

By 2030, more than a third of all births worldwide will be in the 30 countries where female genital mutilation is practiced. Without accelerated progress to protect the growing number of girls at risk of this harmful practice in these countries, millions of girls could be cut by 2030.

It is unconscionable that these girls should be added to the 200 million women and girls in the world today who have already endured female genital mutilation. Who already bear the scars, or suffer related complications, or relive harsh memories of pain and betrayal. Nobody – not the girls, their families or communities – benefits economically or socially in unequal societies where such violence against girls is accepted.

We know how to change this. We have seen that rates of female genital mutilation can drop rapidly in places where the issue is taken on wholeheartedly – by governments, by communities, by families. Where social norms are confronted, village by village. Where medical professionals come together to oppose the practice and refuse to perform it. Where laws are enacted to make it a crime – and where those laws are enforced. Where wider access to health, education and legal services ensure sustainable change. Where girls and women are protected and empowered to make their voices heard.

The Sustainable Development Goals recognize that female genital mutilation undermines progress towards a more equal, just and prosperous world. They set an ambitious target of eliminating all such harmful practices against girls and women by 2030.

Given the rising number of girls at risk, this is a race against trends. But with increased investment and redoubled political commitment, with greater community engagement and more empowered women and girls, it is a race that can be won. And because it can, it must.

It is high time to eliminate female genital mutilation from the face of the earth forever. It is a task for all of us, and for our common future.



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