

Mr. Chair,
Madam Deputy Secretary-General,
Ambassador Webson,
Presidents of the UNICEF and WFP Boards,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,

I thank the Presidents of the Executive Boards for convening this joint town hall. It is a wonderful symbol of your continued engagement and support.

Here is the issue: no matter what the calamity, women and girls tend to suffer most.

With restricted movement and family stress, reports of gender-based violence are skyrocketing. This happened during the Ebola outbreak, and with COVID-19, we see it now. Women and girls trapped with abusive partners, cut off from prevention and response services, lacking support when they need it most.

When overloaded health systems divert midwives and already scarce resources away from sexual and reproductive health services, and when supply chains are disrupted, more women and newborns die; unintended pregnancy, teenage pregnancy and unsafe abortion surge; and it's the poorest and the most vulnerable women and girls who suffer.

COVID-19 is not the great equalizer. The pandemic is worsening inequalities for women and girls. It is deepening discrimination against marginalized groups, such as indigenous peoples and people of African descent. Countries with weak health systems and humanitarian settings are at great risk.

UNFPA stands proudly with the World Health Organization and all United Nations partners as we do our part to address this unparalleled challenge.

Imagine a pregnant woman experiencing difficulty in labour, desperately hailing transport to a health post. When she arrives, there's no one to help; the midwife has been transferred to the big hospital in town.

UNFPA, operating across the humanitarian and development spectrum in more than 150 locations, is on the ground to respond on three priorities in line with our Strategic Plan, our mandate and our collaborative advantages within the UN development system:

1. strengthening the health system's capacity to continue to provide sexual and reproductive health services and interventions;
2. addressing gender-based violence; and
3. ensuring the uninterrupted supply of modern contraceptives and other reproductive health commodities.

We're providing personal protective equipment to health workers, who in the main are women. UNFPA dignity kits address the reality that menstruation doesn't stop during this pandemic, and we work with young people who are sharing vital information to promote healthy behaviors and limit the spread of COVID-19.

UNFPA is coordinating joint efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. We lead the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility under the Global Protection Cluster. Via the United Nations-European Union Spotlight Initiative to end gender-based violence, we are supporting referral pathways, hotlines and helplines, establishing safe shelters and raising awareness so that communities respond en masse.

In Tanzania, UNFPA and other resident agencies have rallied to support the National COVID-19 Contingency Plan.

In Thailand, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNDP jointly designed a survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 upon children and youth.

In the Caribbean, UNFPA is part of a unified preparedness and response effort.

Our work to safeguard the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls aligns fully with the global health response led by WHO, the humanitarian response, led by OCHA, and the Secretary-General's report and corresponding UN socio-economic framework for immediate response to COVID-19. All guide our in-country actions, in concert with the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators.

UNFPA is co-lead together with WHO, of the UN framework's health pillar — now more than ever before, the "first priority" for all national governments.

We are allied in the fight against disinformation, countering stigma with science, fear with facts. UNFPA's contributions include highly relevant technical notes on the COVID-19 response, always highlighting the differential impact of the outbreak upon women and girls.

With the widespread shortages of commodities and increasing requests for personal protective equipment, UNFPA strongly advocated for a collaborative UN procurement exercise, to make efficient use of the consolidated procurement leverage of the UN in order to attract large manufacturers and increase our chances of securing needed supplies, with UNICEF and WHO taking the lead on a joint tender with the participation of most other UN organizations.

With governments, our demographers and statisticians are collecting and analysing data to track COVID-19 cases and target interventions, with particular focus on identifying and locating those most at risk, older persons especially.

In Moldova, with WHO and the Resident Coordinator's Office, we elaborated a real-time data dashboard, showing caseloads disaggregated by location, sex, age, and pregnancy status.

UNFPA is partnering with national statistical authorities to ensure that, even in countries where a full 2020 census will not occur, disaggregated data will be available.

We are mobilizing youth networks and strengthening young people's capacity and opportunities to engage safely and meaningfully — and to lead.

Excellencies,

Together with governments and other partners and with the communities and people we serve, the United Nations is heeding the Secretary-General's call to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and build back better, to attain the Sustainable Development Goals for human progress.

It is said that a kinship tie is like a tree with deep roots; it may bend but it will never break.

UNFPA and other UN partners here today are strong. We are tough. We have deep roots and with your support and guidance we are standing tall together.

Muchas gracias. Thank you very much.