

**Statement by Thoraya Ahmed Obaid
Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund
Launch of *The State of World Population 2009* Report
London, 18 November 2009**

Thank you for joining us today. It is a pleasure, once again, to be in London, to launch *The State of World Population 2009* report from UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund. This report has benefited from contributions from the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the United Nations Environment Programme.

I am also pleased to share with you the youth supplement, which has stories from young people as they confront a changing climate. All over the world, young people have inherited this situation and they are standing up and calling for proper attention to climate change.

Our 2009 *State of World Population* report is called *Facing a Changing World: Women, Population and Climate*. This report calls attention to women and vulnerable populations in the response to climate change.

It points out that climate change is not just about technology. It is a human problem brought about by human activity. People are affected by climate change. People need to adapt to it. And only people can stop it.

During the past half century, rapid population growth and industrialization have led to a rapid rise in greenhouse gas emissions. We have now reached a point where humanity is approaching the brink of disaster.

The damage done to the environment by modern society is one of the most inequitable risks of our time. Right now, the carbon footprint of the poorest billion people on Earth is a mere 3 per cent of the world's total carbon footprint. And it is the poor who will bear the disproportionate brunt of our changing climate.

For many people, especially poor women in poor countries, climate change is here and now. Women work hard to keep their households together. They fetch the water, find the food and the fuel to cook it, and clean up

afterwards. They watch their children's health and care for their illnesses. In recent years, both food and fuel have been harder to find. The available water carries parasites. Malaria is creeping into areas that used to be mosquito-free. And floods, rising seas and drought present growing challenges.

Poor women in poor countries are among the hardest hit by climate change even though they contributed the least to it. Poor women don't take planes. They don't drive cars. As often as not, they can't find a vehicle to get them to hospital if they have a difficult labour. In fact, they get very little support for all they do.

This must change. As this report points out, support for women grappling with climate change means empowering them to take their own decisions and be involved in public decisions that affect their lives. Yes, countries need to invest in green technology and reduce emissions immediately and this is a focus for next month's conference in Copenhagen.

This report points out that countries also need to invest in women – in ensuring alternatives to wood and imported fuel, in secure clean water supplies, in better roads and mobile phones. Girls need education and health care. Women need attention to their own health, including their reproductive health. There are about 200 million women today who would like to space or prevent pregnancies, and who have no access to reliable and modern contraception.

Helping women to make their own decisions about family size would protect their health, make their lives easier, help put their countries on a sustainable path towards development – and ensure lower greenhouse-gas emissions in the long run.

This report argues that we cannot successfully confront climate change if we neglect the needs, rights and potential of half the people on our planet. The report calls attention to populations that are vulnerable because they live in low-lying coastal areas and the potential impact of climate change on urbanization and migration and the need for governments to plan ahead. Governments need to reduce risk and better prepare and manage climate disasters and the displacement of people.

Overall, climate change is not just an issue of energy or the environment; it is also a moral issue of justice and equity. All nations and people have the right to development. And all countries are challenged to develop in ways that are socially equitable and environmentally sound.

Women should be part of any agreement on climate change—not as an afterthought or because it's politically correct, but because it's the right thing to do. Our future as humanity depends on unleashing the full potential of all human beings, and the full capacity of women, to bring about change.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to your questions. Please state your name and affiliation.