

Check against delivery



**Statement by**  
**Dr. Natalia Kanem**  
**Executive Director, UNFPA**

**Annual Session of the Executive Board of**  
**UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS**

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**New York**

Good morning. *Buenos días*. Here's a [video](#) prepared as part of UNFPA's campaign urging all of us to 'keep the lights on' for women and girls in the most desperate humanitarian circumstances. Let's watch. [*Video plays.*]

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,  
Dear colleagues, dear friends, dear young people,

Peace is foremost in our minds and a constant concern for the women and young people UNFPA serves.

Recently, I've reflected upon the tremendous unique work UNFPA does and the people with whom we have the responsibility to do it:

The midwives who bring comfort and care to women when they and their newborns need it most.

The frontline women's organizations offering expert insight into the needs of their communities.

Mobile health teams braving treacherous conditions to bring life-saving services, family planning and prenatal care to women in the most remote of communities.

Religious and traditional leaders come to mind, joining us in advocating for girls' education and against child marriage, and the boys and men who must be applauded for their defense of women and girls and their rights.

Teachers and parents open doors for UNFPA to assist adolescents on their journey into adulthood safely and in good health.

And always, I think of my selfless UNFPA colleagues – some 6000 strong, working in more than 150 countries across the development-humanitarian-peace continuum.

I consider the nearly one hundred Member States whose core contributions make that work possible, and I thank you for that.

Joint programming within the United Nations system is crucial to UNFPA's achievements. Here, I must say a word of appreciation to UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner – an important partner and friend over our past eight years of common service as Under-Secretaries-General in New York.

And of course, my thoughts turn to you, esteemed members of the Executive Board. Your stewardship guided UNFPA to unprecedented success, even with the pushback, on occasion, against elements of our core mandate.

Over the past decade, with your all-important political and financial support, UNFPA made enormous progress for women and girls. We advanced their health, their rights, their bodily autonomy and their choices. Together, we achieved and made a difference in the lives of women and young people.

Today, we are a proud public health and population agency, a key partner in delivering essential services to women and girls in development and humanitarian circumstances, and in helping young people to promote peace.

Today, UNFPA is a stronger, more focused, more transparent agency than ever before. We are the only entity in the United Nations system entirely focused on reproductive health and rights across the life course – from the prenatal period to, hopefully, a healthy, happy old age, work that underpins so much progress against the Sustainable Development Goals, as evidenced in my annual report to the Board.

What does this look like in practice?

It means that, with countries in the lead, contraceptives will reach the last mile, so that women and couples can decide freely whether or when to have children.

UNFPA trains and deploys tens of thousands of midwives, so that even in the most hard-to-reach settings, women can deliver safely, and they and their newborns survive and thrive.

We work with partners, community and civil society leaders and families so that girls get an education and avoid early marriage and female genital mutilation.

And under the aegis of United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, UNFPA has succeeded in making the aspiration for peace in the home and the end of gender-based violence a priority. The scourge of gender-based violence must come out of the shadows – that's the first step to ending it once and for all, including online and technology-facilitated gender-based violence – an area where UNFPA continues to play a leading role.

UNFPA is on the ground, prepositioning supplies and developing anticipatory action plans with governments and civil society – even before disaster strikes.

Our collaboration with local and women-led organizations is an essential part of that equation, representing more than 40 percent of UNFPA's humanitarian funding. Women are the experts, with an intimate understanding of the lives and needs of their families and communities.

Since 2015, UNFPA helped avert more than 350,000 maternal deaths. We prevented around 140 million unintended pregnancies and over 40 million unsafe abortions.

Since 2018, UNFPA delivered over 400 million couple-years of family planning protection through provision of hundreds of millions of condoms and numerous forms of modern contraception of a woman's choice.

The trust shown to UNFPA by programme countries and donors alike is remarkable. UNFPA being entirely voluntarily funded, it's significant that we doubled our revenue over the past decade. That reflects confidence in our mission and our ability to deliver. The development marketplace is a competitive one, and it has spoken over and over again in favour of UNFPA – because of our results, as outlined in my annual report, because of our mandate, our sharp focus, our prioritization, our efficiency and our transparency.

By any metric – evaluations judging the satisfaction of the women and girls we serve, multilateral performance assessments, audits, or in terms of revenue – under the guidance of this Executive Board, UNFPA is a pronounced success story.

Partnership in action: UNFPA results show the power of global solidarity, a principle currently being tested like never before. Sexual and reproductive health and rights have many proud champions. Yet these rights come continually under siege in some quarters, with alarming rollbacks and funding cuts now threatening hard-won progress.

The gap between needs and resources is stark. Multilateralism is being questioned, and international humanitarian law flouted with impunity – all while crises, conflict and climate change push more and more women and girls to the brink.

The women and girls UNFPA serves – those represented by the statistics I just mentioned – feel this deeply, personally.

Though they may never know the names or faces of you in this room, or of decision-makers in your capitals, they feel the difference your support makes in their lives.

As they will certainly feel the impact, should diminished funding result in diminished ambition, or if reflexive decisions about change and structures fail to put women and girls at the heart of our development, humanitarian and peace responses.

If the United Nations doesn't stand by the side of a ten-year-old girl in a least developed country or a pregnant woman fleeing conflict or crisis, who will? Yes, it's the right thing to do. It's also the best investment any country can make.

The central premise of the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, the ICPD, is clear; its central promise is also clear: reproductive rights are human rights and a precondition for women's empowerment, essential for the advancement of societies and the well-being and prosperity of all people.

Data and evidence repeatedly bear this out. When women and girls can access healthcare, they are more likely to finish school, join the workforce and raise healthier families.

The returns are ripples of hope that multiply across generations, leading to stronger economies, healthier populations, and more secure and resilient societies around the world.

Our new UNFPA Strategic Plan 2026-2029, to be submitted for the Board's approval at the Second Regular Session in August, reaffirms UNFPA's critical ICPD mandate and, particularly, our normative role.

UNFPA proudly defends the rights of all people, especially anyone too often pushed aside or pushed behind – persons with disabilities, indigenous women, people in all their sexual diversities, people of African descent, those living under protracted crisis and young people, in a refugee or IDP camp, for example.

As I arrive at the end of my eight-year tenure as UNFPA Executive Director, I count our support to truly leave no one behind among the highlights.

Today, UNFPA is a recognized leader in the fields of human reproduction; population data, census and statistics; logistics and delivery of reproductive commodities at scale; humanitarian response on sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence; and on youth leadership development, including youth, peace and security.

Today, no other United Nations agency combines operational and human rights work the way UNFPA does, with a clear focus on women and girls throughout the life course.

In that vein, I request the support of this Board to ensure that the important work we've done collectively in recent years puts gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health prominently at the centre of every crisis response as the humanitarian reset goes forward. UNFPA is indispensable in the protection cluster leadership, and we intend to continue as a provider of last resort to end gender-based violence and help survivors find healing.

Going forward, the voices, expertise and leadership of local actors, especially women-led organizations, will be more important than ever in humanitarian delivery.

Today, UNFPA delivers faster, and we reach farther than ever to deploy our expertise within hours of the onset of a crisis. Our approach is not just about speed. It hinges on delivering real impact and the life-saving services that women and girls tell us must be prioritized in every humanitarian response.

The new Strategic Plan, the development of which was skillfully led by our Deputy Executive Director, Programme, Diene Keita, keeps a focus on attainment of three transformative results – zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices – all of these efforts resting on a sound basis of population data and evidence.

Yet now, UNFPA also must adapt to a world of rapidly changing demographics. Hence, the introduction of a fourth strategic plan outcome: demographic change and population dynamics, which reflects countries' increasing demand for UNFPA expertise in this space, notably on issues related to high fertility and also low fertility, population ageing and census support.

This is advice and support that UNFPA is uniquely equipped to provide. By harnessing data and evidence, we are helping governments to develop policies and programmes that build demographic resilience, while also upholding the personal rights and choices of women and girls. The private sector increasingly is joining us in this platform.

Turning now to the Integrated Budget that accompanies the Strategic Plan, I emphasize that it is not business as usual. Under the leadership of our Deputy Executive Director, Management, Andrew Saberton, UNFPA undertook scenario planning very early on, and we budgeted conservatively in anticipation of the current funding constraints. The steps we took proved protective for our programming. We successfully diversified funding via International Financial Institutions, philanthropy, the private sector and UN pooled funding. Gratifyingly, last year UNFPA saw record income of nearly US\$1.7 billion US dollars, with a substantial part of that growth coming in for our humanitarian work.

With concern about potential further reductions, UNFPA is adjusting our high-level financial framework and will report back in the coming months.

UNFPA has extensive experience consulting with Member States and taking into account diverse views and interests. The positions of individual countries may change over time, yet a diversity of perspective and opinion is a normal and welcome part of elucidating our work on the Strategic Plan and its Integrated Budget. We strive to achieve balance. We count on your support in that effort, and related to this, allow me to repeat that operationalizing the Strategic Plan at the country level always is firmly grounded in the concept of national ownership, and expressed in the Country Programme Documents.

In recent weeks I've listened keenly to Executive Board members from all five regional groups. UNFPA benefits enormously from such consultations, and having analyzed the feedback, we are fully confident that the direction articulated in the Strategic Plan is the right path at the right time to accelerate progress.

Therefore, we request and eagerly look forward to your approval of the Strategic Plan and Integrated Budget during the August session. I call upon the Executive Board to meet the moment we face with strong support for UNFPA's work and to not get sidetracked. Regardless of terminology, the women and girls we serve deserve your support.

Señor Presidente,

At the 1994 ICPD, Member States asserted that reproductive health and women's empowerment are intertwined. Both are necessary for societies to advance. This holds true in development and humanitarian settings, and it holds true when women take their role in fashioning the peace.

Women and girls belong at the centre of development. They are never passive victims of conflict and disaster. They are leaders, change-makers, and the backbone of recovery, resilience and sustainable development. Women's strength, courage and determination are central to stabilizing families and to creating lasting peace and security.

As is well known, in the past few months UNFPA and our partners experienced devastating funding cuts by a key donor. For UNFPA alone, this meant cancellation of more than 40 existing projects worth more than \$330 million US dollars.

These cuts translate into cuts in essential services, which put millions of already vulnerable women and girls at even greater risk, depriving them of the health and protection services they rely on. Even before the funding cuts, humanitarian needs far outstripped the funding, which makes this loss even more catastrophic.

For example:

- In **Afghanistan**, 21 women's clinics already shut their doors, and another 18 are in limbo. More than 550 facilities will have to close by the end of 2025. And up in the mountains, it will mean women won't have access to any health services.
- In **Jordan**, since 2013 UNFPA's safe delivery services in Za'atari Refugee Camp meant the successful delivery of more than 18,000 babies without a single maternal death. I am so sad to report that now the maternity ward is closed.
- In **Pakistan**, UNFPA life-saving interventions manage the treatment of rape, prevent HIV and deliver basic emergency obstetric and neonatal care. That has ceased in 65 health facilities.
- In **Somalia**, 12 community clinics staffed by midwives have been forced to shutter, and training and deployment of additional midwives halted.
- In **Haiti**, over a million people need gender-based violence assistance. Any eventual suspension of funding will create significant gaps in staffing and programme continuity.

The financial outlook becomes cloudier as other donors look to reduce aid.

Therefore, UNFPA must anticipate reductions in both core and non-core resources this year.

However, as mentioned, we are taking proactive measures in our budget and revenue scenario planning. Nevertheless, already the impact is huge, especially in humanitarian settings.

For this year, 2025, we urge you to strongly support the UNFPA humanitarian appeal, which calls for \$1.4 billion US dollars to deliver irreplaceable reproductive health and GBV prevention and treatment services to more than 45 million women and young people across 57 countries.

We have analyzed the most neglected crises – and the list is long, including Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Mozambique, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Venezuela – where persistent funding gaps converge with already weakened health and protection services for women and girls.

UNFPA humanitarian response plans in these countries were under 30% funded in 2024. What this means on the ground is a shortage of midwives to support women in labour; the absence of medicine and equipment to take care of childbirth complications; shuttered safe spaces; and a lack of medical care, counselling and legal services for survivors of assault.

The video you just viewed was produced as part of our “Lights Out” communications campaign. Please help UNFPA keep the lights on.

## UN80

Mr. President, Excellencies,

I now turn to the UN80 initiative announced by the Secretary-General and in which my team and I have been extensively engaging with the Secretary-General's office and other principals, both bilaterally and through the UN Sustainable Development Group and the Inter-agency Standing Committee. As protective as UNFPA's scenario planning has been, we are not complacent. We intend to be drivers of our own destiny and to continue our stellar track record of programme delivery and management efficiencies.

UNFPA is reviewing its business model. We are anticipating and responding to the evolving geopolitical and funding environment. The new Strategic Plan will assure that UNFPA delivers results effectively, efficiently, and at scale in every context. UNFPA is asking not only what we need to do, but also how we do it—so that our operations, presence, and systems adapt to the expressed needs of those we serve.

As you know, UNFPA has long been a leader on the efficiency agenda, currently co-chairing the Business Innovations Group. In making our organization more fit for purpose, we took difficult decisions. After more than two years of careful planning and consultation, more than a third of our headquarters decentralized – most recently with relocation of technical and programme staff and the Independent Evaluation Office to Nairobi. This follows transformations of our Humanitarian Response Division, now based in Geneva, and our Copenhagen-based supply chain management operations.

UNFPA also leads when it comes to outsourcing. As part of UN80, we are volunteering to outsource all our back-office operations to other entities so that we remain laser-focused on our mandate and what we do best.

I have already outlined how the ICPD is UNFPA's North Star and how, as a public health and population agency, what we deliver is unique.

Now, UN80 offers a generational opportunity to realign the UN system around a coherent, accountable, measurable and transformative platform.

The UNFPA mandate is central to the entire sustainable development agenda. It must be protected and promoted, and we very much count on the Board's support in that regard.

Let's not sacrifice human rights and reproductive rights in the name of expediency or efficiency. UNFPA speaks frankly and intelligently about culturally sensitive issues, always factoring in the context, and always rigorously upholding free choice in reproductive matters, and assuring there is informed consent without coercion of any kind.

As always, UNFPA stands ready to listen, we are alert to opportunities and amenable to compromise, understanding that it is our values underpin our success: mission clear; methods flexible.

What is important is that UNFPA technical expertise and presence on the ground be protected, so we continue to respond to country expectations. To decisively end maternal mortality, for example, programme countries depend on UNFPA's support more than ever, and our capacity-building assures that development is indeed country-led – especially as population structures are changing dynamically.

## **Oversight**

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

Across all facets of UNFPA programmes and operations in all settings, my senior management team and I remain unwavering in our commitment to upholding the highest standards of accountability and transparency. We welcome the annual reports of the Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS), the Independent Evaluation Office, the Ethics Office and the Oversight Advisory Committee.

We are also pleased to present the new UNFPA accountability framework, which brings together internal controls, risk management, ethics, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, financial management and oversight.

UNFPA values the constructive guidance provided by OAIS and the other oversight bodies, and we work closely with them to address areas of concern.

In upholding zero-tolerance for all forms of wrongdoing, we continually strengthen measures for protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, including through a dedicated unit.

I commend the Independent Ethics Office for its nurturance of a culture of ethics, integrity and accountability, which enhances the trust in and credibility of UNFPA, both internally and externally.

I also commend the Independent Evaluation Office. Evidence-based decision-making and organizational learning are vital for accelerating progress on UNFPA's transformative results.

For the past eight years, Director Marco Segone has been the face of evaluation at UNFPA. We arrived together, and I have appreciated his skill, dedication, his support for young evaluators and his work to strengthen evaluation across the UN system, including as Chair of the UN Evaluation Group. This is Marco's last Executive Board session with UNPFA, and we wish him well in his retirement and future endeavours.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

Today also marks my final address to the Executive Board. It brings to mind UNFPA's indebtedness to my predecessor, the late Professor Babatunde Osotimehin, and every one of our highly distinguished former Executive Directors. The collaborative spirit that has defined our work together during my two terms as Executive Director has been tremendous. I especially thank you, Mr. President, Ambassador Andrés Efrén Montalvo Sosa, and all the Board presidents of my tenure, starting with Ambassador Ib Petersen. Your impeccable stewardship is part of the success narrative of UNFPA. I also sincerely thank every Bureau member, past and present, for your kind attention to UNFPA.

And I reserve a heartfelt, profound thanks to my wonderful UNFPA colleagues across the globe. Your work in every country office and on the humanitarian frontlines showcases the trademark skill, passion and integrity that define the UNFPA staff.

Thank you for keeping your eye on the well-being of that 10-year-old girl moving through her adolescence. She inspires us every day. I also appreciate our civil society partners, as well as our academic, philanthropic and private sector associates and the women-led groups with whom we share resources and a firm commitment to advancing rights and choices.

What an honour it has been to lead UNFPA, an organization primed for even greater heights! I leave with so much faith in the United Nations, in UNFPA and the important work that this agency does. And I have every confidence that the organization I leave behind will become ever stronger, more resilient and more nimble.

You should know that when I talk with women and girls who have suffered unspeakable violence and trauma, they tell me they have been bolstered by UNFPA's safe spaces and dignity kits. Our psychosocial support and health services are helping them to overcome mistreatment and to look forward with hope in their hearts.

I have also met women in their time of tremendous joy, welcoming a wide-eyed healthy newborn into the world. I will never forget women like Mariel, a young mother from a typhoon-ravaged community in the Philippines, who gave birth in a UNFPA mobile facility, which was basically a great big truck. Mom was all smiles introducing me to her baby girl born on Valentine's Day. Her chosen name: "Heart Eunne Fae" in honour of UNFPA!

In communities where child marriage and early childbearing are the norm, with UNFPA's help girls are defying the odds, claiming their right to stay in school and inspiring other girls to pursue their dreams.

A 13-year-old girl I met at a UNFPA one-stop centre in Chad – a safe space offering medical, psychosocial and legal services for survivors of sexual violence – was another indelible encounter. Despite the horrific trauma she endured, her eyes lit up when she told me her dream: to go back to school.

I recall women weeping at a refugee centre in Moldova. They fled their homes in Ukraine with their children and whatever they could carry in a backpack or sack, leaving husbands and other loved ones to an uncertain fate.

And displaced women and children in Somalia, walking for days and weeks across a parched landscape in search of food, water and safety.

The harrowing stories of hunger, hardship and harm make abundantly clear why it is so important that UNFPA be present; that the rights of women and girls to health, safety and dignity be prioritized.

Contraception, sexual and reproductive health care, protection from gender-based violence – these are not luxuries. While sometimes debated in these august halls, let us make no mistake: these are essential services that women and girls everywhere need and that are their right.

Even when there are opposing positions, let us agree that much more unites than divides us.

As language is debated, let us unfailingly uphold the fundamental values that must never be compromised.

What better way to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Charter than for “we the peoples” to “reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women”.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

As Member States navigate the next chapter of reform, I appeal to you to safeguard that which matters. By every metric we have kept over the past eight years and discussed with you, the communities we work with matter. UNFPA matters. The work we do saves and changes lives. It is valued. It is effective and efficient. It is irreplaceable.

I am immensely proud of our teams around the world and the way they continue to deliver, whatever the challenges.

Because somewhere there’s a precious 10-year-old girl happily playing in her island home. She’s on the cusp of adolescence, and thanks to UNFPA, she will be well prepared to navigate that adolescence with great anticipation, and without fear.

Somewhere else, there's a woman with no choice but to flee. She's running in panic, gathering children and baggage. UNFPA must be there to receive her, to represent her needs. She's not asking for favours. She just wants to give birth safely, maintain her dignity, and exercise her reproductive rights. She wants help to undo damage that never should have been inflicted in the first place.

And UNFPA will accompany her into the light where she can live the life she deserves, replete with power and beauty.

Mr. President, Members of the Executive Board,

That's her right. And that's our promise.

That's the ICPD vision for which UNFPA is custodian.

Together, let's make it real for every girl, every woman, every young person.  
Together, let's build that brighter future of rights and choices – for everyone.

We know it can be done, because with you UNFPA has shown that it can and will be done.

## **Closing remarks**

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,

This morning, I highlighted some of the impressive results that UNFPA has achieved over the past decade.

From the Cairo ICPD in 1994 to the Nairobi Summit in 2019 and last year's ICPD30 commemoration, up to today and beyond, the UNFPA story is the story of public health achievement: People are living longer, healthier lives. Fewer women die while giving life, and more women and couples have access to modern contraception, which means that more pregnancies are planned and wanted than ever before. It's much safer to be a woman today; it's easier for a girl to get an education, and for a young woman to choose her life's trajectory.

Also notable – because it builds trust upon which those results are built – are UNFPA's efforts to foster a 'speak up' culture of ethics, integrity and accountability. The UNFPA Integrity Group comprises the Office of Audit and Investigations, the Ethics Office, the Legal Office, our PSEAH unit, the Department of Human Resources and the Ombudsman. All function to assure the coherence, voice, and participation of our staff everywhere, to enable them weigh in on what's going well, but also what is going wrong.

Evaluation is also central to the monitoring functions of UNFPA. Evaluations provide us with the evidence to determine whether our decisions and actions are working and under what conditions, allowing us to course correct as needed.

Taking my leave after 8-plus years at the helm of UNFPA, I express sincere thanks to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for his signal leadership, so needed on the world stage today, and for his trust in my leadership.

I thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed who herself models exemplary leadership, and my executive colleagues.

I am immensely grateful to each and every UNFPA staff for the seriousness with which you undertake your duties, always with an adolescent girl in mind and how best to set her on a path to prosperity. Thank you, my dear colleagues. I will surely miss you.

May I also thank you, esteemed members of the Executive Board. I've noticed that some of your delegations are quite small; others are well staffed. Regardless, you take keen interest in UNFPA's mandate to expand reproductive rights and choices for all. You take your equal place in the dialogue of nations and weigh in on the decisions manifested by this Executive Board on behalf of "we the peoples".

Mr. President, Distinguished Member of the Executive Board

It is said that “It’s only in winter that we know which trees are evergreen.”

Be assured, UNFPA is evergreen!

I thank you for your support, partnership and kindness to me over the years, and most especially for your commitment to UNFPA and its vital work.

The march continues.

Adelante!