

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY MESSAGE BY THORAYA AHMED OBAID/UNFPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



**"Today on International Women's Day, and every day, let us go forward with the vision that progress for women is progress for all."**

On International Women's Day, let us pay tribute to all women worldwide who contribute so much to the well-being of their families, communities and nations. In every part of the world, women are the weavers of the fabric of society, and progress towards equality is being made. Today more girls attend school, more women hold parliament and government seats, and more women benefit from paid employment. Yet there is still a long way to go to achieve true equality.

As long as one woman dies needlessly each minute from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, we have to prioritize the health and rights of women. This includes the right to sexual and reproductive health. As long as millions of girls are forced to marry as child brides, we have to stand up for equal treatment and opportunity. This includes the right to an education and to make the most of one's potential.

As long as there is widespread violence against women and girls and impunity for these crimes, we have to enact and enforce equitable laws and tilt the scales to justice. And as long as girls continue to go missing, as 100 million girls are today due to a preference for sons, we have to mobilize for real change to end unequal treatment, discrimination and violence against girls and women.

The struggle for gender equality is one of the greatest challenges of our time.

Today on International Women's Day let us go forward united in the conviction that women's rights are human rights, that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that all persons are entitled to live free of discrimination. More than 60 years ago, in 1945, the founders of the United Nations inscribed the guiding principle of equality between men and women in the United Nations Charter. Three decades later, in 1979, delegates adopted the first comprehensive international treaty to advance and protect women's rights. In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development, leaders declared for the first time that reproductive health and rights are fundamental to women's empowerment, gender equality and sustainable development.

And fifteen years ago, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, world leaders agreed on a platform for action for equality, development and peace.

Today many of these agreements are reflected in the Millennium Development Goals to which world leaders have agreed to reduce poverty and put our world on a more sustainable path. These goals and agreements guide policymakers and ordinary citizens to demand change and to hold their governments accountable for the promises they have made.

UNFPA remains fully committed to working with partners to advance women's empowerment, gender equality and reproductive health and rights.

With ideas spreading faster than ever, here is an idea whose time has come: We stand a better chance of solving the world's problems if men and women join together as equal partners in finding innovative solutions. Today on International Women's Day, and every day, let us go forward with the vision that progress for women is progress for all.