



UNFPA state of world population 2019

# UNFINISHED BUSINESS

the pursuit of rights and choices **FOR ALL**

## State of World Population 2019

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### MAPS AND DESIGNATIONS

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# UNFPA

Ensuring rights and choices for all since 1969

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Remarkable gains have been made in sexual and reproductive health and rights since 1969, when UNFPA was established. But despite progress, hundreds of millions of women today still face economic, social, institutional and other barriers that prevent them from making their own decisions about whether, when, how often and with whom to become pregnant.

The pursuit of rights and choices is an ongoing one, with new challenges emerging all the time.



# Make rights and choices a reality for all

It was 1969. World population reached 3.6 billion, up about 1 billion from only 17 years earlier. Fertility rates worldwide then were about double what they are today. In the least developed countries, fertility was about six births per woman.

Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, released the year before, had incited a global panic about "overpopulation," which the author predicted would lead to mass starvation on a "dying planet."

It was in that context that UNFPA was established to advise developing countries about the social and economic implications of population growth and to support national population programmes, which began dispensing contraceptives on an unprecedented scale.

Through these programmes, real reproductive choices became a reality for more and more women in developing countries. And as a result, women started having fewer children. Millions were finally gaining the power to control their own fertility.

Despite the increasing *availability* of contraceptives over the years, hundreds of millions of women today still have no access to them—and to the reproductive choices that come with them. Without access, they lack the power to make decisions about their own bodies, including whether or when to become pregnant.

The lack of this power—which influences so many other facets of life, from education to income to safety—leaves women unable to shape their own futures.

Since its creation in 1969, UNFPA has led a multilateral effort to help women in developing countries navigate through an ever-changing landscape of barriers to their reproductive rights. This effort gained new momentum and inspiration in 1994, when 179 governments gathered in Cairo for the International Conference on Population and Development and forged a plan for sustainable development grounded in individual rights and choices and the achievement of sexual and reproductive health for all. That plan, embodied in a Programme of Action, not only re-energized the global reproductive rights movement but also positioned UNFPA as the movement's custodian.

The combined actions of civil society, governments, development institutions and UNFPA over the past 50 years have unlocked opportunities and possibilities for women and girls across the globe. Yet, we still have a long way to go before all women and girls have the power and the means to govern their own bodies and make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

At the same time, we must push back against forces that would see us return to a time when women had little say in reproductive decisions or, for that matter, in any area of their lives.

The fight for rights and choices must continue until they are a reality for all.

**Dr. Natalia Kanem**

United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund



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