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## **Ban stresses need for reproductive health care for young people**



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23 April 2012 –

[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today stressed the need to provide reproductive health care for young people, as well as give them access to the necessary information and the means to protect themselves from sexual abuse and violence.

“We cannot ignore the facts. Many young people are sexually active, and because of this, they may face risks to their health, including sexual violence,” Mr. Ban said in his [remarks](#) to the

Commission on Population and Development, which opened a week-long session at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The Commission, composed of 47 elected Member States, meets annually to discuss population issues and trends in relation to development strategies and policies. The theme of this year's meeting is 'adolescents and youth.'

In his remarks to the Commission members and representatives of more than 500 non-governmental organizations, Mr. Ban emphasized that the international community must empower youth in this regard, as they are not only a growing demographic sector, but also a force for change and progress as evidenced by the various popular movements in the Middle East and other parts of the world over the past year.

"This generation of youth is the largest in history. Even more important, this generation of youth is shaping history," Mr. Ban said.

The UN chief underlined the importance of combating HIV/AIDS among youth, lowering the rates of teenage pregnancies, and protecting children from early marriage.

"Sixteen million adolescent girls become mothers every year, and every day, more than 2,000 young people contract HIV," Mr. Ban said. "We have a collective responsibility to drive these numbers down."

Mr. Ban also noted that the Cairo Programme of Action, adopted at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, is still a relevant guide to ensure a better future for the world's youth.

"We must be guided by its wisdom and carry out its recommendations," he said, referring to the Programme of Action, which articulated a new vision about the relationship between population, development and individual well-being.

"An adolescent girl struggling in poverty requires different protection than a male college graduate. Our goal is to provide a safe, secure and healthy environment for all, regardless of their circumstances," he noted.

During the session, Mr. Ban also submitted a new report to the Commission, produced by the UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)), which states that urgent action is needed to protect young people's right to sexual and reproductive health.

The report highlights the need to give millions of girls access to reproductive health services to avoid unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections.

Figures for child marriage and female genital mutilation are also high, the report warns, with up to 60 per cent of sexual assaults involving girls under the age of 16, and more than three million girls worldwide being at risk of female genital mutilation or cutting every year.

"Many assume that all young people have access to information, that most are likely to stay in school, that they postpone entry into the labour force until they finish a degree of education and

that they delay marriage and childbearing for when they are ready,” said UNFPA’s Executive Director, Babatunde Osotimehin. “However, this is not true for all adolescents and youth across the world. In fact, many of these issues are still a major challenge for the majority of young people in developing countries.”

In addition to reproductive health care rights, Mr. Ban underlined, in his remarks, the need to give young people access to education, adequate nutrition and employment, and referred to the upcoming UN Sustainable Development Conference ([Rio+20](#)), in Brazil in June, as an opportunity for countries to renew their commitment to address issues relevant to young people.

“Two months from now we face a test. The world will gather for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio. This is our one-in-a-generation chance to advance progress on the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)) for the sake of our planet and its people,” the UN chief said. “Let us make sure that young people have their place across the international agenda.”

The eight MDGs range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015.

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