

NEWS RELEASE

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UN report calls for increased focus on culture

Wellington, 17 November 2008 - A new UN report launched in Wellington today calls for an increased focus on culture in efforts to promote peace, development and human rights around the globe. Knowing how a culture works and how to work with it is vital to development and aid effectiveness, but is sometimes overlooked.

The Pacific launch of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund's 2008 State of the World Population report *Reaching Common Ground: Culture, Gender and Human Rights* was hosted by Family Planning International in cooperation with the Council for International Development.

"Understanding and working with diverse cultures is vital to achieving positive development in the Pacific. It can also reveal the most effective ways to challenge harmful practices and promote human rights, particularly in relation to populations and development issues, gender, and reproductive health. Culture often determines access to human rights and we know that cultural traditions and beliefs are often stronger than laws," says Mr. Najib Assifi, Director Pacific Sub-Regional Office and UNFPA Representative.

"We have found that if we want to make greater progress, we have to engage at a deeper level to facilitate change in the lives of individuals, families and communities by developing programmes and policies that are culturally sensitive and done in partnership with not only government, development and NGO partners, but with Faith Based Organisations as well. It is only when we include those who are the cultural gatekeepers in finding the solutions that we will begin to see the changes that will help us to reach common ground," says Mr. Assifi

The UNFPA report states that gender inequality remains widespread and deep-rooted in many cultures. *"We have found this is certainly the case close to home in the Pacific. There are still many barriers to people enjoying their human rights, including the right of individuals and couples to plan the timing and spacing of their children, and the right to health, including sexual and reproductive health. It is important that New Zealand's overseas development assistance includes a focus on working with Pacific cultures and all genders to ensure these rights are enjoyed by all"* says Joanna Spratt, Family Planning International Manager.

The report also includes a youth supplement *Generation of Change: Young People and Culture*. Young people have their own cultures and understanding these is critical. Young people can be highly effective as builders of peace, human rights and development, as well as mediating between cultural tradition and cultural change. *"The Pacific is a youthful region. It is important that we listen and work in partnership with youth in our region. Youth hold the key to the future economic, social, political and cultural wellbeing of the Pacific"*, says Mr. Assifi.

Background

Every year, UNFPA launches a State of the World Population report on an issue facing the global community. UNFPA is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV and AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect. Family Planning International is a unit of Family Planning New Zealand. Family Planning International works to ensure all people can enjoy sexual and reproductive wellbeing, with a particular focus on the Pacific region.

ENDS

Event Information

Media are welcome to attend the launch event:

2008 State of the World Population Report Launch
Reaching Common Ground: Culture, Gender and Human Rights

6.00 – 7.15pm, 17 November

Council for International Development
2nd Floor, James Smith Building
Crn Manners Mall and Cuba Street
Wellington
New Zealand

Panel Speakers:

Najib Assifi, UNFPA Representative to the Pacific
Dr Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, Director Va'aomanu Pasifika, Victoria University
Joanna Spratt, Family Planning International Manager

If possible, please RSVP to the contact details below.

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