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Largest international family planning conference in 15 years opens

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Tuesday, 17 November 2009

Over 1,200 leading policymakers, researchers, academics and health professionals from 59 countries on Sunday started a meeting in Kampala, Uganda, to share the latest scientific findings and refocus the world's attention on family planning's contribution to development.

The International Conference on Family Planning: "Research and Best Practices", which would be held from November 15-18, is supported by more than 30 organizations and co-sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Makerere University School of Public Health.

A statement issued by the UNFPA to the Ghana News Agency in Accra on Monday quoted Mr Werner Haug, Director of the Technical Division of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, as saying "Family planning has been a development and a public health success.

"Giving people access to voluntary family planning saves lives and can help break the cycle of poverty, slow population growth and ease the pressure on the environment. It is a cost-effective development investment," he said.

Since the 1960s family planning has helped reduce fertility in developing countries from an average of six births per woman to three.

More than 200 million women worldwide currently seek to delay or avoid pregnancy, but lack safe and effective means to family planning.

"In some countries, the unmet need for family planning outruns the actual use, and the United Nations estimates that by 2050, contraceptive demand will grow by 40 per cent as record numbers of young people enter their reproductive ages."

The statement noted that despite decades of research and field experience with successful family planning programmes, global attention to this health intervention had dramatically declined in the past 15 years which had led to less government support and funding for family planning programmes, risking couples' ability to space their births to their families' benefit.

Mr. Haug therefore called on governments, organizations and civil society to ensure universal access to reproductive health by 2015 and also to back "this goal with political commitment and financial investments".

"If the Millennium Development Goals are to be met and people are to live and prosper, the international community must place reproductive health and family planning on the top of the development agenda," he says.

Presentations will cover new research, including research in contraceptive technology and family planning issues such as integrating contraception and HIV prevention; male options for family planning; and contraceptive commodity security.

Participants will also discuss and seek the way forward, reaffirm the importance of family planning and recommit to the vision and realization of universal access to family planning.

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