



Statement by the UNFPA Representative in Malawi Ms. Esperance Fundira

On the Occasion of the

Launch of *The State of World Population Report for 2007*

Capital Hotel - 27 June 2007

- Minister of Economic Planning and Development, Honourable Ted Kalebe, MP
- The Principal Secretary for Economic Planning and Development, Mr. Patrick Kamwendo
- The Director of Planning in the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development, Mr. C. Chiunda
- UN colleagues
- Members of the press
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for joining us today.

It gives me great pleasure to be here on the launch of *The State of World Population Report for 2007* from UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund. United Nations Population has today launched the *The State of the World Population Report 2007*, titled *Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*.

A youth supplement, *Growing up Urban*, was also released and features incredible stories of young people in cities around the world. It presents the challenges of urbanization through the eyes of young people.

In 2008, for the first time in history, more than half of the world's people will be living in towns and cities. That's half of all people on Earth. And by 2030, urban population is expected to swell to almost 5 billion-- which will be 60 per cent of world population.

In Malawi, Ms. Esperance Fundira delivered a speech ([link](#)) highlighting global concerns including poverty, crime, lack of clean water and sanitation, and expansion of slums. But these problems pale in comparison with those that could be raised by future growth.

We have never seen urban growth like this in history in terms of its speed and scale. Yet, the impact of future urban growth has not adequately been attended to. And surprisingly little is being done to maximize the potential benefits of this transformation or to reduce its potentially negative consequences.

Most cities struggle to meet current needs and they are quite unprepared for future growth.

This year's *State of World Population* report is a call to action. The vast urban expansion in developing countries has global implications and requires a global response.

Urbanization is inevitable. The train is in motion and together we have to make sure we are on the right track.

Urbanization can and should be a force for good. No country in the industrialized age has ever achieved significant economic growth without urbanization.

Cities concentrate poverty, but they also represent poor people's best hope of escaping it.

Cities create environmental problems, but they also create solutions.

But to take advantage of these opportunities, cities need to prepare now for the coming growth. If they wait, it will be too late.

This wave of urban growth is without precedent. The changes are too large and too fast to allow planners and policymakers simply to react. The report urges far-sighted analysis and proactive measures.

I would like to highlight a few of the most pressing issues and possible responses.

For one thing, we know that poor people make up a large part of future urban growth. Therefore, the poor people must be part of the solution.

Realistic planning calls for explicit consideration of the needs, rights and participation of slum dwellers and the urban poor.

Today, a billion people live in slums, 90 per cent of whom are in developing countries. The battle to reach the Millennium Development Goals, and cut extreme poverty in half by 2015, will be waged in the world's slums. To win it, policymakers need to be proactive and start working with the urban poor so they can lift themselves out of poverty.

The only way to meet and defeat urban poverty is head-on, helping the poor find solutions to their own problems. Organizations of the urban poor, including women's organizations, are increasingly powerful and should be supported. They have often come up with creative solutions to housing and other community needs, often in the face of opposition.

The State of World Population also dispels a common myth. Contrary to popular belief, most urban growth is the result of natural increase rather than migration, that is to say most cities are growing from within. In response to this,

policymakers should shift the emphasis from stemming migration to delivering social services and investing in women.

Investments in education and health, including reproductive health and voluntary family planning, and the empowerment of women are the best way to address urban population growth.

Giving priority to women's empowerment increases the health and well-being of families and communities.

Finally, the report draws attention to the large youth population in cities in developing countries, particularly in urban slums. In many developing countries, including Malawi, half of all urban dwellers are under the age of 25. In response, greater investments are needed to provide young people with basic services, employment and housing.

Young people are the future and cities are where they can realize their dreams. Failure to invest in urban youth will derail efforts to reduce poverty and increase the potential for urban crisis.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that what happens in cities now will shape our common future. Now is the time to begin a concerted effort for *Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*, as the title of this year's report suggests.

I thank you for your attention.