



**Statement of Ms. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid  
Executive Director  
at the Press Conference to Launch  
*Adding It Up: The Benefits of Investing  
In Sexual and Reproductive Health Care*  
London, 3 February 2004**

I am very pleased to be here today with Sharon Camp of the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) to launch this important report, *Adding It Up*, on the benefits of investing in reproductive and sexual health programmes. UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, has been privileged to collaborate on this project with AGI, whose superb research and analysis have informed policymaking in this field for decades.

At one level, the argument for greater global investment in reproductive health services should be obvious. The international community has long recognized that all couples and individuals have a right to decide whether and when to have children. Yet, hundreds of millions of people worldwide who want to space their families lack access to modern contraceptive methods.

This is a violation of their human rights, and the consequences are appalling: millions of unintended pregnancies, often resulting in unsafe abortion or maternal or infant death; and continuing rapid population growth in the world's poorest countries.

Inadequate services and information to promote safe motherhood and prevent sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS also cause enormous death and suffering worldwide. To take one example, there is a notorious undersupply of condoms to prevent HIV infection in countries where the epidemic is most severe.

But, as we all know, development budgets and foreign assistance are limited, and policy makers need solid evidence to make the hard decisions about allocating scarce resources. *Adding It Up* strongly makes the case that reproductive and sexual health programmes are dramatically underfunded, and that investments in this sector have a tremendous impact, both on the health and well-being of individuals and families, and on the economic health and development prospects of nations.

It does this by marshalling a wide array of research analyses that use various means of measuring the human and financial costs of poor reproductive health, and of estimating the benefits that more resources in this sector would bring. Sharon will give you some of the highlights of these findings.

The bottom line, no matter how the analysts approach the issue, is that money invested in sexual and reproductive health services will be repaid many times over in direct savings on other health and social services. It will also promote economic growth, poverty reduction and gender

equality, and will help to fight the economic and social devastation caused by HIV/AIDS. These benefits will come in addition to the gains in healthier lives and reduced human suffering that cannot really be quantified.

In some ways, this report is just a first step. More complete data and better methodologies are needed to enable economists and health policy experts to analyse costs and benefits more thoroughly, particularly the non-medical gains—such as improvements in the status of women—that are hard to measure and usually undervalued.

Nevertheless, the evidence presented here makes it absolutely clear that reproductive and sexual health programmes must be included in the short list of priority interventions that need to be funded in order to achieve the United Nations' Millennium Development goals. Funds have to be allocated commensurate with the large returns they will bring, and with the high costs—human, social and economic—of continued under-investment.

In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo called for universal access to sexual and reproductive health care by 2015, as an indispensable part of the development agenda. This year, the world community is reviewing progress and ongoing obstacles in implementing the Cairo Programme of Action, as we approach the halfway mark. We are documenting extraordinary achievements by developing countries in addressing reproductive health concerns—including those of adolescents and young people, who urgently need better protection against unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

But, the review also shows how the shortage of resources is impeding progress. Unless international assistance rises to the levels agreed to at the Cairo Conference, this already serious situation will worsen as the numbers of people who need family planning and other services continues to grow. *Adding It Up* is therefore intended to help realize the vision of Cairo as well as the Millennium Development Goals, by persuading those with the power to increase spending that reproductive health is not only an essential human right, but also a very good investment.

Thank you.