

Our rights. Our freedoms. Always

Statement of UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin,

On the occasion of Human Rights Day

10 December 2015

Today, we mark the launch of a year-long campaign for the 50th anniversary of two landmark international treaties. Together, the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** and the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** have shaped the integral and indivisible nature of the international human rights framework.

These two Covenants, along with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, became the **International Bill of Human Rights**, setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights obligations that are inherent to all human beings and equally relevant for a life of dignity and well-being.

These documents have inspired national constitutions and laws; they have given hope and legitimacy to social movements; they have led states to come together to define concrete actions for a better world and peaceful societies.

The International Conference on Population and Development was one of those important milestones that brought the human rights standards and principles into concrete action. More recently, the 2030 Development Agenda has articulated clear linkages between sustainable development goals and human rights.

Today is a day to celebrate, but also a day to give a voice to the women, girls, men and boys who claim their human rights, including their right to sexual and reproductive health, as an indivisible component of the International Bill of Human Rights.

The International Bill of Human Rights has provided women and girls with a legal claim to demand access to quality sexual and reproductive health services. It has given adolescent boys and girls a claim to enjoy an education that promotes gender equality and provides objective and scientifically accurate information around sexuality and reproduction. It has given women from rural areas living in poverty a claim to be free from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, such as forced sterilization. It has given pregnant women a claim to demand their right to privacy and freedom from discrimination, disrespect and abuse when giving birth in a health centre. It has given a young girl suffering from fistula a claim to fight against stigma

and social neglect. It gives all of us the right to an effective remedy when our rights and freedoms are violated.

The four freedoms that underpin the International Bill of Human Rights – **freedom from fear, freedom of speech, freedom of worship and freedom from want** – are directly relevant to the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

All too often, the most disenfranchised persons in society are unable to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The ability of women, adolescents, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities or persons of diverse sexual expressions to speak up and to be free from fear and from want is often curtailed by discriminatory cultural or social norms.

For that reason, the international human rights framework has continued to be enriched over the last 50 years with other core instruments that provide special protections to the most disenfranchised to ensure that nobody is left behind in the quest for a life of dignity and worth.

This vision is not new. It is a founding principle of the United Nations, whose 70th anniversary we recently celebrated.

Today, let us honour International Human Rights Day by demanding that all nations live up to that vision.