

11 July 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on World Population Day**

This year's World Population Day is dedicated to the world's one billion adolescents and their right to reproductive health and the information and services that enable them to realize that right.

Adolescence is a uniquely vulnerable period of life. It is a time when many young people confront sexual and reproductive health issues for the first time. They must deal with new pressures and new risks. And, unless they are given the necessary support, they may not be able to make the informed decisions that lead to healthy lives.

Approximately 10 percent of all births are to adolescents, with 15 million girls aged 15 to 19 giving birth each year. These pregnancies are considered high-risk because adolescent girls are twice as likely to die from pregnancy and childbirth than women in their twenties, and their children face a higher chance of child and infant mortality. Young people should be informed of the dangers. They should be provided the support they need to make active decisions about the timing and spacing of their children. And they should be provided the support they need to prevent them or their children from becoming a mortality statistic. Mongolia provides an excellent model. All secondary schools are now required to teach a course on sexuality education, designed by education professionals with United Nations Family Population Fund support.

Services and information are also critical in stalling the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Every day nearly 6,000 young people become infected with HIV. Half of all new infections occur among young people aged 15 to 24. We have seen, however, that comprehensive government programs can significantly slow transmission rates. In Thailand, for instance, a massive public information campaign produced dramatic results. An estimated 200,000 – 400,000 fewer people were infected with HIV/AIDS than would have been in the absence of decisive government action. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, spells out the right of the child to “seek, receive and impart information” and to “enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health.” I call on Member States today to ensure that adolescents are not deprived of their right to health care services and information.