

*Statement of Mr. Fabian Byomuhangi, UNFPA Country  
Representative,  
At the unsafe abortion and family planning awareness event  
Polytechnic of Namibia  
On Wednesday 8 September, 2010*

Director of Ceremonies,

Rector of the Polytechnic of Namibia, Dr. Tjama Tjivikua,

Director of NAPPA Mr. Sam Ntelamo

Distinguished faculty members and staff of the Polytechnic,

Students,

Members of the Press,

Distinguished Invited Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honor and privilege to be invited to this important event, where we are focusing on creating awareness on unsafe abortion and family planning. Let me express my gratitude to the organizers for inviting UNFPA to participate in this event.

Unsafe abortion is one of the preventable pandemic globally. According to the WHO 46 million pregnancies are terminated annually of which 50% are done illegally, through unsafe abortion, performed by an unskilled service provider and often under unhygienic conditions. Consequently, and as a result of sever complications, unsafe abortion, contribute to 13% of

maternal mortality or up to 68,000 maternal deaths annually, as well as more than 3 million reproductive tract infections, and almost 1.7 million cases of secondary infertility worldwide.

Sadly 97 % of all unsafe abortions occur in developing countries

Coming home to the region, specifically to Namibia, unfortunately there is limited information on unsafe abortion. This is mainly due to the fact that illegal abortion in Namibia is conducted underground and often by untrained providers.

According to Namibia's Abortion and Sterilization Act (1975), as amended through Act 48 of 1982, abortion is legal in Namibia only when the pregnancy endangers the life, physical or mental health of the woman; when there is fetal malformation, and when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest.

As indicated earlier we do not have the figures on illegal abortion, nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that it is happening in the country.

Anecdotal evidence suggest that while it is difficult to deduce the extent to which maternal mortality is a result of unsafe abortion especially from the health statistics, often community members are aware of one or more women who have died as a result of illegal abortion.

Ladies and gentlemen, unsafe abortion has been defined as a procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy by an individual without the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimum medical standards. Often women undergo unsafe abortion, using different methods e.g. oral and injectable medicines, intrauterine foreign bodies, detergents, solvents and bleach. Sometimes abortion is done by abdominal massage. All these are likely to contribute to the busting of the uterus, and foreign bodies inserted into the uterus damage the uterus and internal organs and may lead to the death of the women. Other women have

carried the pregnancy to term, just to dump the baby at birth. The MOHSS reported that between 2009 and 2010... new born babies were dumped by their mothers. Some of the dumped babies were found alive while others were found already dead.

*Why do women resort to unsafe abortion?*

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a well-known fact that we all like life and our women, sister, daughters and wives would not resort to unsafe abortion if they could avoid it. There are various factors that contribute to that among them is the socio economic concerns, which include poverty, lack of support from family and partner, disruption of education or employment, and also where the pregnancy was unwanted or a result of rape or incest. Other factors are lack of availability and access to contraception has been proved to be a major factor in unsafe abortion. The bottom line is that pregnancy is terminated because it is not wanted and the use of contraceptives would certainly have prevented an unwanted pregnancy.

As you may be aware Namibia has the highest contraceptive prevalence rate on the continent, estimated at 47%, however, there are few challenges as unmet need for contraception is estimated at 3%. Of concern is the high rate of unplanned pregnancies. According to the Demographic Health Survey, two third of all births in Namibia are unintended; 41% are unwanted and 22% are mistimed.

*What can be done?*

Unsafe abortion remains one of the most neglected sexual and reproductive health problems globally.



As you may be aware my organization UNFPA supports Government and Non-governmental organizations to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe. The guiding principle in addressing Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights is well stipulated in the ICPD agenda of which the Government of the Republic of Namibia is signatory. Relevant to today's event is paragraph 8.25 where governments agreed and asserted that abortion will never be a form of family planning; and that family planning should be expanded to reduce unwanted pregnancy and that women who suffer complications from abortion should have ready access to life saving treatment and care

*What can be done?*

The first strategy for preventing unsafe clandestine abortion is to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancy through measures such as improved access to effective contraception, post-abortion family planning counseling, **health education campaigns** aimed at promoting use of family planning services including condoms, and male involvement. Studies have also shown that a community that empowers its women's folk through education and employment will definitely in the long run benefit from social and economic development. The provision of family planning services is one way of empowering women and ensuring their reproductive rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are happy to note that NAPPA and Polytechnic of Namibia are collaborating to create awareness on unsafe abortion. We also note that the issue of Reproductive health including prevention of unsafe abortion is a multifaceted problem requiring multi-dimensional approaches.

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen, unsafe abortion remains a major cause of maternal mortality among adolescents in Africa. The United Nations Population Fund is committed to support both GRN and NGO's in

addressing this pandemic. We shall continue to provide the necessary support with a focus on primary prevention including advocacy and support services that will assist adolescents/young people to prevent unwanted pregnancy. The good news is that NAPPA has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture to provide SRH services at the Multi Purpose with Youth center. This will create a conducive environment especially for students and out of school youth to access Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in a friendly confidential atmosphere. Multi propose youth centers, will ensure that young people have access to contraceptives and critical SRH services which is likely to contribute to the reduction of unsafe abortions.

Once again we wish to commend the Polytechnic of Namibia and NAPPA for starting this initiative and reiterate our commitment to continued collaborative effort with the two institutions.

I thank you for your attention.