

# Girl Force: Unscripted and unstoppable on the road to Nairobi and beyond!

*Statement by UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem on the International Day of the Girl Child, 11 October*

Around the world, girls are challenging gender stereotypes and breaking free from the traditional roles that society has dictated for generations. More and more are saying no to child marriage and pushing for an end to the practice. They are advocating for their right to stay in school and to live free from violence and harm. They are calling for urgent climate action and working to build more just, equitable and sustainable societies.

On this International Day of the Girl Child, let's stand with them. This means ensuring that they have the information and support they need to make a safe, healthy transition to adulthood. It means listening to their voices and respecting their rights and choices.

When girls have age-appropriate knowledge about their bodies and relationships, they are better able to prevent pregnancy and protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. They can stay on track to complete their education and gain the skills they need to find and keep decent jobs and reach their full potential. This is life-changing for girls and game-changing for societies. Empowering girls in all spheres of their lives can help countries lay the foundation for prosperity and well-being and reap a demographic dividend of economic growth.

These issues and more will be on the agenda of the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 (<http://www.nairobisummiticpd.org/>), being co-convened in November by the Governments of Kenya and Denmark, together with UNFPA. At the Summit, governments, civil society, the private sector, community leaders, international institutions and others will make concrete commitments to achieve the goals set out by 179 governments at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, or ICPD. These goals include ensuring girls' rights to education and health; eliminating child marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices; and meeting the special needs of adolescents and youth for access to information and reproductive health care.

At UNFPA, we believe in the power of girls to take control over their bodies, write their own script and shape their own lives. Our global strategy for adolescents and youth *My Body, My Life, My World* (<https://www.unfpa.org/youthstrategy>) is our rallying cry as we march with them towards the Nairobi Summit.

Next year, the world will also mark the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, another milestone on the path towards rights and choices for girls.

Many of the promises that governments made to girls in Cairo and Beijing have yet to be fulfilled. By following through on our commitments, we will set the stage for girls to live the lives they dream and be the unstoppable force for progress we know that they are.