

**Speech by Mr. Thomsen Anders Thomsen,  
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Greetings!

Thank you for inviting me to this forum, where young people like you are partners in development. Young people are at the heart of UN's global mandate.

Your unprecedented importance is borne out by facts: India is one of the youngest nations in the world. It has the highest proportion of young people in history and their population is growing.

We are seeing the power of young people in influencing socio-political change, from the Arab Spring to the anti- corruption movement in India, and recent protests over safety of women, where the youth are playing a leading role in furthering women's rights.

In India, there couldn't be a better time for all of you to have a say and ensure your voice is heard in the development debate.

The work of the UN can in broad terms be divided in two inter-related categories: 1) Peace and Security and; 2) Economic Growth and Development.

Going through the program of this model event, I could not help but noticing that emphasis is placed on Peace and Security. In UNFPA our entry point is along with the fund and programmes of the UN, Sustainable Growth and Inclusive Development, which, I also believe is the underpinning for National and International Peace and Security.

With that in mind the UN under Kofi Annan's leadership put together a groundbreaking vision for a changed world: "The Millennium declaration". Based on which the 8 Millennium Goals were formulated with time-bound targets. (2015)

Have we reached the goals? No, there are many reasons.... Lack of political will, financial crisis, slow bureaucracies, natural disasters, war and conflict...

Still too many people live in abject poverty, too many infants die before they reach 1 month of age, too many women die giving birth, too many people lack access to the most basic services, such as drinking water, latrines and basic education.

However, MDGs outlined an unprecedented ambitious and very clear plan.

The MDGs were criticised for being formulated without consultation. Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon has just now initiated a process referred to as the consultations on the post 2015 agenda. A high-level panel with international dignitaries are steering this process. Chaired by Indonesian President, Liberian President and the PM of UK.

The purpose is to formulate a new set of Sustainable Development Goals. India will be very important in this context and debate.

The world's problems are India's problems. If the goals do not work for in India and China (highest proportion of world's poor) then they won't work for the world.

On the other hand, the world will not be able to meet its targets in reduction of People living in Poverty, of Infant Mortality... of gender inequality, youth fertility, malnutrition (among many others) if these problems are not adequately resolved in India. India must take responsibility and must act locally and at home to influence change globally.

For the UN, this is an increasingly important time to focus on fulfilling the needs of young people. We are working to integrate your voices in government policies around the world.

For you to think about in your discussions, I would like to share with you some key population projections of UNFPA

I would like to fast forward to year 2030! By that time most of you will transition from being young to being middle aged like me. But which world will you find?

(You need to think about these MEGA-trends as you plan your own futures, but also when you think about what you can do for the world)

- By 2030, India will continue to have the youngest populations in the world. It will be among a few countries in the world with excess labor- this represents a tremendous opportunity. (However, this is only if people have been adequately educated and trained)
- By 2030, India is projected to overtake China and become the world's most populous country. By this time, India would be the world's third largest economy. The middle class would grow many times over, but a large rural population would still remain poor, dependent on agriculture and lacking marketable skills to make the transition from agriculture to the industry or service jobs. (Inequality will rise and things will be more expensive..)

- More and more people will move from rural to urban areas. By 2030, the urban population will double. This will lead to enormous demands for improved living conditions, employment and provision of basic services, likely to challenge existing urban governance capacities. (Many of you are from Mumbai... What will Mumbai be to live in with double the amount of people??)
- We will also have an ageing population... the number of people over 60 will double by 2030, and make up 13% of the population. The majority of them will be women. (There are no pensions out there and poor health coverage for elderly... be prepared to pay the bills...)
- Life expectancy will increase, but life style diseases are also likely to rise and put pressure on the health system (get you exercise...)
- Projections show continuing gender inequality as the sex ratio at birth will remain skewed. In India, this figure is abysmally low in some areas, and nationally it is... just 927 per 1000 boys. (Just don't do.. Don't engage abort a girl before even born... it is against the law and it is unethical).
- A major challenge that will mount in the time to come is global climate change and environmental degradation that are impacting our lives in multiple ways. These forces affect access to safe drinking water, agriculture production, food security and health leading to serious socio economic consequences.

How should we prepare to meet the challenges and make use of the opportunities that these profound changes will bring? What defines our development agenda?

The biggest **challenge and opportunity** India faces right now is utilising the benefit of a young population... to reap the demographic dividend. India's ability to do so... before the window of opportunity closes... requires that we invest in adolescents and young people with health, education and skills... as sustained economic growth depends on the capabilities of its young work-force.

UNFPA is leading a life skills education programme in the country with the govt. of India's support. It gives adolescents in school and out of school skills to deal with real life situations involving their reproductive health, gender and growing up concerns.

We urgently need to address continuing gender inequality that manifests itself in reduced opportunities for women, child marriage, and violence against women.

Vulnerable young women, including girls from tribal areas, lower castes and minorities are often marginalised in development policies as they lack access to education and health services, are often married off early, and denied opportunities for developing their full potential. UNFPA believes that investing in these young girls helps break cycles of poverty.

Gender inequality affects progress across several key development indicators. Women will continue to face other struggles to ensure equality, safety and security at all levels. India ranks 129 of 146 countries in the UNDP gender inequality index.

At the heart of the matter lies the deeply rooted practice of child marriage across India. More than 40% of the world's child marriages happen in India. In eight states of the country, more than half of young girls are married before the age of 18.

When girls have a choice, they marry later. Investing in girls, developing their social and economic assets, ensuring they have access to education and health services means healthier families and higher levels of gender equality. This in turn makes for stronger societies and more vibrant economies. Investment in later marriage for girls is investment in development for everyone.

We are promoting research into on gender discriminatory practices such as sex selection and child marriage and influencing policy on enhancing the status of women.

Young people and women are the key focus of the post 2015 agenda... the development agenda that will follow post the MDGs. The UN believes that you, the youth, are an important part of the solution to the issues we face today and in the future. **SPEAK UP AND MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD.**

The world needs your active engagement. Whatever decisions you make now will determine the future in 20 years. That is why the United Nations needs your engagement on the challenges that will shape the world you will grow older in.

I urge you to use the knowledge and skills you gain from this Model UN exercise and other pursuits to advance the objectives of the United Nations. Your generation is showing a growing resolve to change our world. Stay engaged. Join local politics. Volunteer in a local organization. Be an example of positive change.

Act locally to make change globally!