

REMARKS  
by  
DONA DA COSTA MARTINEZ  
DEPUTY REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN REGION, IPPF  
at  
THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
of  
THE JAMAICA FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION  
19<sup>th</sup> August 2021

***“Overcoming the Challenges of Change”***

Dr. Shakira, Maxwell, President of the Family Planning Association of Jamaica,  
Dr. Pauline Russell-Brown, Chief Executive Officer of the Family Planning  
Association of Jamaica,  
Members of the Board of FAMPLAN,  
The membership,  
My colleagues from ACRO Office,  
Invited Guests.

My dear friends, pleasant good morning to every one of you.

It is indeed a great pleasure to join you today to bring remarks at your 63<sup>rd</sup>  
Annual General Meeting. I bring you greetings from my Regional Director,  
Eugenia Lopez Euribe and my other colleagues in the Americas and Caribbean  
Regional Office. My relationship with the Jamaica Family Planning Association,  
goes way back to the mid-1980s, and so I welcome this opportunity to join with  
you this morning on this special occasion.

I appreciate your strong commitment, leadership, and willingness to work  
together with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) in  
addressing many important sexual and reproductive health and rights  
challenges which we are facing these days. And I wish to recognize the work of  
Pauline Russell Brown and her tiny team that have been able to achieve so much  
in 2020 despite the challenges.

It is important to remind ourselves of why we are so committed in doing this. It  
is because of the promise that we all made that as IPPF, we will work towards a

world where women, men and young people everywhere have control over their own bodies, and therefore their destinies. A world where they are free to choose parenthood or not; free to decide how many children they will have and when; free to pursue healthy sexual lives without fear of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. A world where gender or sexuality are no longer a source of inequality or stigma. We will not retreat from doing everything we can to safeguard these important choices and rights for current and future generations.

As such as a Federation that is locally owned and globally connected, we share a common vision of promoting healthy sexual and reproductive lifestyles among all whom we serve by providing access to the services and information they need. Together we have worked and continue to work to improve the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights landscape for ALL.

Your theme for this AGM– Overcoming the challenges of Change - is extremely pertinent. We have witnessed that overnight, our world has been upended by Covid-19 and laid bare the vulnerabilities in existing health care systems. We have seen that our priorities have shifted in the interest of protecting public health. That our governments have stepped up and provided relief to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. The work that we do have been negatively impacted as scarce resources and attention have been diverted away from sexual and reproductive health care to tackle the increasing pandemic-related needs. These events have thrown us into emergency mode which requires that we act differently and change how we do what we do to ensure that we deliver on that promise that we made.

No one ever said that change is easy. Dealing with change can sometimes be painful, confusing and challenging. Change entails stepping out of our comfort zone. It means doing things in a way different than we were used to. It means being brave (and sometimes angry) and having the fortitude and courage to make that change that is required of us by the vulnerable populations that we serve - women, girls, men, boys, the disabled, LGBTQI persons, migrants. It also means going against the opposition to make a difference in people's lives.

It is now clearer than ever that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the global health efforts and set it back perhaps by decades, and even more so when it comes to sexual and reproductive health and rights. As sexual and reproductive health organizations, we too have had to confront these challenges by making changes in the way we function in many ways. We have

had to pivot and embrace new modalities for ensuring our clients' needs continue to be addressed. We have had to struggle with other competing interests for financial support to continue our work. And we have struggled to keep all our staff despite the financial impact on our organizations. The list goes on and on.

Now, as our countries enter their recovery phase, we keep hearing the phrase ad nauseum, of the need to "Build back Better". Though this may appear daunting to some of us, it provides a critical opportunity to reposition sexual and reproductive health and rights as an integral and critical element of our national health systems. We must recognise that our actions during the crisis and our decisions coming out of it, will determine not only our Associations' future value but our credibility. This is important because like all our Associations must do, for FAMPLAN to become a more resilient organization, will depend on a shift to sustainable practices, will depend on its willingness to become uncomfortable with the issues that confront you daily. It will depend too on our *raison d'etre*, on the vision we have for the people we serve in our region. It will depend on our belief that we are all sexual beings, that we all have bodily autonomy, that our children are entitled to comprehensive sexuality education so that they could lead productive and fulfilling lives; that we must serve all our vulnerable populations and that we will require to change the way we do advocacy.

All of this and more would be required of us if we are to build back better and overcome the challenges that confront us in the arena of sexual and reproductive health.

As Family Planning Organizations we will need to identify ways to find more resources to dedicate to our work in sexual and reproductive health. To go beyond the previous status quo, to develop new strategies for making equitable progress on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

This situation, though it may appear daunting, presents us with new opportunities and challenges. Let me share with you an inspiring quotation from George Bernard Shaw. He said, "***Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything***".

So, we must think clearly what is before us and how will we define our future?

To address the challenges brought on by all the challenges facing us, and take substantial steps toward achieving full sexual and reproductive health and rights for all people, it is now incumbent upon us to regain and accelerate momentum by pursuing some focused actions.

The call to “build back better” provides a critical opportunity to take a comprehensive approach to reposition sexual and reproductive health and rights as foundational to our region’s health systems. The time has come where we must prioritize sexual and reproductive health care in our countries’ rebuilding efforts, harnessing renewed momentum to achieve universal health coverage and catalyzing collective action for gender equality, which cannot be achieved without ensuring all individuals can make decisions governing their bodies and can access services that support that right. Recognizing the central role of sexual and reproductive rights in achieving gender equality can help drive progress for both agendas. A major effect of the pandemic, such as the reports of alarming increases in sexual and gender-based violence, have revealed the urgency of building more inclusive coalitions to address these intersecting challenges.

It will also require of us to become more innovative with our service delivery strategies. The pandemic has constrained our clients’ access to sexual and reproductive health care, due to closure of our clinics because of government-imposed restrictions on movement that have limited people’s ability to travel and caused a surge in demand for telehealth and self-managed care options.

However, our Member Associations have been rising to the challenges and developing innovative ways to conduct service delivery. This provides an opportunity for us to learn from each other. It is important that policies and new service delivery models devised in direct response to COVID-19 and other disruptions that have temporarily expanded access to care must be integrated into health systems on a more permanent basis, since we have all accepted that this will be the new normal.

It is incumbent upon us to pursue also innovative financing options to mitigate the economic fallout from the pandemic and develop funding strategies that will sustain our operations for a long time to come. We have already been seeing the cutbacks on funding to critical areas such as ours and the rationalisation by donors on what their funds should support. The time is now for us as a region to build back together and to strengthen our work in sexual and reproductive health and rights for all whom we serve. I wish to share with you the words of

Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estes, author and spoken word artist who said, **“Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach”**.

I am happy to let you know that you are not in this alone. The leadership of ACRO and CFPA have been having discussions on the way forward for the Caribbean. It is planned that together we will develop a Roadmap with the support of all our Member Associations. A Roadmap that will reposition us to face the future with more certainty and with a renewed spirit. You will be hearing more on this shortly as ACRO and CFPA will be hosting a Town Hall meeting to share plans with all our MAs and to have your full participation in all the processes going forward.

Let us not remain complacent in discomfort but be open to learning how to be truly comfortable with our convictions and do something about it. Let us go forward together and embrace change. According to Ross Perot “The activist is not the man who says the river is dirty. The activist is the man who cleans up the river”