



Strong political and financial backing is needed to enable the United Nations Population Fund to ensure the sexual and reproductive health rights of the world's poorest and marginalized people – most of them women and girls, said Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of UNFPA, during a visit to Brussels this week.

“There is still a lot to be done: 225 million women in the world require family planning and are not getting it. Maternal mortality has been cut in half in the last 25 years, but we should get to zero. No woman should have to die while giving life!”

In order to deliver, Dr. Osotimehin stressed the importance of both, political and financial support for UNFPA, and highlighted the role of the Population Fund as the global custodian of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Dr. Osotimehin visited Brussels on the occasion of the ‘She Decides’ conference that was attended by nearly 50 government representatives joining forces and rallying financial support for the issues that UNFPA looks after globally. Pledges made during the conference totalled 181 million Euros.

“When you gather data, what you find is that those who are left behind, those who are disadvantaged, those who don’t get information or services, are women and girls. They are the ones we focus on, as they are the ones that tend to be disadvantaged in just about every circumstance”, he said. “But, this does not imply that we don’t work with boys and men.”

When talking to European counterparts, Dr. Osotimehin stressed the importance of highlighting the magnitude of the problem that exists in the world with regard to UNFPA’s mandate. “What we remind our European friends and partners of, is that when a woman can decide how many children she wants to have, when she wants to have them, and how she wants to space births, it is liberating. This is what has happened in Europe and it can happen elsewhere”, he says.

Dr. Osotimehin regretted that many countries today push back on the sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda rather than promoting and advancing it, but it is a coin that has two sides. “There are those who push back – but that’s because we are making progress!”

“We are fortunate that most of Europe actually relates to the rights agenda”, he stressed. “They have seen very concretely what has happened in their own countries when women are heard, and are allowed to participate and exercise their rights and what benefits it has brought their economies. Ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights for everyone is imperative for development.”