



PARTNERSHIP TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTIVES

JIS
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MORE persons who have been unable to access reproductive and sexual health products will soon be able to, with the signing of a partnership geared towards improving the supply and demand for items such as male and female condoms.

The letter of intent, involving the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the Population Services International (PSI), was signed Monday at the UNFPA Sub-Regional Office for the Caribbean in Kingston.

The partnership will focus on strengthening the management of reproductive health products, such as equipment and pharmaceuticals for obstetrics and maternal health care, for the prevention and management of reproductive tract infections and sexually transmitted infections and contraceptives.

Director of UNFPA Sub-Regional Office for the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, Harold Robinson, said the partnership would strengthen an agreement reaffirmed 15 years ago in Egypt by 179 governments, that every person has the right to determine the number and spacing of their children and to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.

"Too many people in our region do not have access to reproductive health. We believe this partnership will allow us to effectively tackle this weakness," Robinson said.

Importantly too, Robinson said the collaboration takes on added significance, as it is being launched this year, the 15th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development.

Senior Programme Advisor at IPPF Western Hemisphere, Lucella Campbell, said the joint venture was of particular relevance, as the Caribbean has the second highest incidence of HIV/AIDS in the world after the sub-Saharan Africa.

She said at the end of 2007, approximately 250,000 people were living with HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean.

"This initiative is important too, in that it acknowledges not only the right of the man to have control in the sexual encounter but, in placing emphasis on the female condom, it equally recognises the right of the woman to influence that exchange," she said.

The partnership also seeks to provide reproductive health supplies and support services to individuals across the region, in expanding the availability of condoms to non-traditional outlets such as beauty shops and reducing the cultural barriers that inhibit condom use.

Universal access to reproductive health is coupled with reproductive rights, and relates to the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning.

It also involves the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to safely go through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy baby.

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