



**BRIEF STATEMENT BY NIYI OJUOLAPE, UNFPA COUNTRY
REPRESENTATIVE, GHANA
AT AN OUTREACH AND DONATION TO THE GHANA
FEDERATION OF DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS (GFDO)
ON WED. 17TH JUNE, 2020 AT THE GHANA FEDERATION OF
DISABILITY ORGANISAION, ADABRAKA, ACCRA**

All Protocol Observed:

- **President of the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisation,**
- **Distinguished Participants,**
- **The Media,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

To begin, I bring you warm greetings from Country Office of the United Nations Population Funds (UNFPA) in Ghana.

As you may all be aware, we are living in very uncertain times and moments. Ghana recorded the first case of corona virus in mid-March. Since then, the number of positive cases have continued to increase. Ghana Health Service reported a total case count of 11, 422 with 51 deaths as of June 14, 2020. Even though reports indicate that our health systems are not yet overwhelmed, there is every indication that Ghanaians must adhere strictly to laid down



protocols in order to contain the virus. My friends, COVID-19 has affected all of us in several ways.

It has disrupted our `normal way' of doing things including how we implement programmes. So as you can see, our numbers here are very small, we are wearing face masks and we are spread out to ensure social distancing. The world we live in has changed.

Women, adolescent girls, refugees, the disabled are facing barriers in accessing health care services including Family Planning amidst the fear of contracting the virus and unavailability of the full complement of staff to provide services. The barriers are contributing to a rise in unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and some maternal deaths. There are also reports of a rise in cases of sexual and gender based violence including rape and domestic/partner violence.

My friends, the corona virus pandemic is threatening efforts to achieve global and national SRH/Family Planning (FP) targets; including the SDG and FP2020 targets; and also achieving the three UNFPA transformative results: zero unmet need for Family Planning, zero preventable maternal deaths and zero sexual and gender based violence and harmful practices. In fact, the pandemic threatens to reverse gains made over the years in



improving contraceptive uptake and reducing domestic violence and other forms of violence.

The effect of the pandemic on vulnerable populations such as Persons living with disabilities (PWD), is even more devastating due to the peculiarities of the impairments they present and the already existing inequities in accessing services. Inequities include environmental barriers in accessing public health information, barriers that make it difficult for PWDs to take up public health measures to prevent infections such as hand-washing and physical distancing. Moreover, depending on underlying health conditions, persons with disabilities are at greater risk of developing more severe cases of COVID-19 if they become infected. This may be because COVID-19 exacerbates existing health conditions or because the COVID-19 response creates barriers to accessing health care.

PWDs are also affected by the devastating social and economic dimensions of this crisis due to poverty and already limited job opportunities. As a result, they may be unable to afford needed hygiene items such as face masks, quality hand sanitizers and afford decent housing with access to running water and therefore are at greater risk of contracting the virus.

Again, PWDs face huge communication barriers worsened by COVID-19. The increasing number of advertisements on various media outlets on



keeping safe from the virus automatically excludes many PWD. The adverts are featured without sign language interpretation and other accessible formats e.g. braille.

Meanwhile, the Sustainable Development Goals, UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Ghana Disability Act and other human rights instruments enjoin states to respect the rights of vulnerable groups and ensure that No One is left Behind in Development and that everyone is catered for during pandemics such as COVID-19.

I am pleased to say that UNFPA remains committed to supporting government to explore innovative means to continue to reach women, adolescent girls and vulnerable populations with essential social services and vital information. UNFPA is supporting government in the emergency responses to fight the pandemic, procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), dignity kits and others.

As an agency, we continue to advocate prioritization of the provision of essential health care services, including SRH/FP services to all persons including PWDs, even in the pandemic. It is important to minimize disruption to the provision of contraceptives to Clients and to ensure commodity security and a functional supply chain, amidst COVID-19.



Our passion to continue to serve vulnerable populations explains why we are here today. Today's outreach forms part of several UNFPA's interventions to improve SHE/FP/SGBV among PWD. Some of you will recall the very important major SRH workshop organized by UNFPA for PWD at La Palm Hotel, other outreaches carried out right here within your premises, to commemorate World Contraception Day and other advocacy efforts.

Today, UNFPA deems it appropriate to support the various groups under the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations with some items to contribute in ensuring that PWD stay safe from COVID- 19 and continue to have access to SRH/FP and SGBV information and are able to decide whether, when and with whom to have a family.

We enjoin PWD and other vulnerable groups to obey and adhere strictly to Government's directives to wear face masks, social distancing, frequent hand-washing under running water and eating nutritious food to boost our immune system.

My friends, let us all stay safe and by God's Grace, this too shall pass.