

ICONS

& ACTIVISTS

50 YEARS

of people making change



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On the following pages, we pay tribute to changemakers. Celebrating their contributions is a fitting way to mark the 50th anniversary of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, and the 25th anniversary of the landmark 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, ICPD. They represent countless valiant others who have likewise made a difference. Their stories illuminate how far we have come—and how far we need to go.

At UNFPA, we are proud of what we have accomplished with our partners since 1969. Access to contraceptives has significantly expanded as a result of our policy work advising developing countries on national population programmes. As more women gained access to voluntary modern contraception, they also started having fewer children. These advancements made clear that choice brings change.

By 1994, the conversation had shifted. When 179 governments gathered in Cairo for the ICPD, they affirmed, in a visionary Programme of Action, that the path to sustainable development begins with individual rights and choices, and depends on the achievement of sexual and reproductive health for all.

Many of the people profiled in this book shaped and energized the global movement for sexual and reproductive health and rights. Others are poised

to carry it forward as we approach the goalpost for achieving Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The book is organized around 10 themes most central to the ICPD Programme of Action and the work of UNFPA. It also includes profiles of activists who champion causes beyond the UNFPA mandate that are part of an ongoing global debate about rights and choices. Under each theme, profiles are loosely organized to tell a story of how major issues have come together and evolved over time.

We still have a long way to go to fully implement the Cairo Programme of Action so crucial to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Change and choice have eluded hundreds of millions of women who currently lack access to contraception and quality maternal health care or who are subjected to gender-based violence or harmed by practices such as female genital mutilation and early forced marriage.

As we seek to tear down the remaining barriers standing between women and girls and their rights and choices, let us appreciate all the leaders and activists that over the generations stood by our side and accelerated change. They come from civil society, government and development institutions. They include thousands of dedicated UNFPA staff



Frances Kissel

Frances Kissling

“ My first exposure to the abortion issue was dealing with women who faced what for them were **deeply difficult situations in pregnancy,** who were **suffering very much.** And my sympathy always has been for [them].”

Based in the United States, **Frances Kissling** is a leading international voice on women, religion and reproduction, having headed Catholics for a Free Choice (now known as Catholics for Choice), a non-profit advocacy organization, for 25 years. For a brief period in her early life she entered a convent to become a nun. But swept up in the women’s movement of the 1960s, she left and was soon directing a clinic that began providing abortions shortly after the practice was legalized in New York State. Kissling was a prominent voice at the Cairo conference, developing a steady stream of arguments to shape the final consensus.