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Secretary-General
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**SECRETARY-GENERAL, AT UNITED NATIONS POPULATION
AWARD CEREMONY, PRAISES EFFORTS**

EGYPTIAN ISLAMIC RESEARCH CENTRE

Following are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks at the United Nations Population Award ceremony in New York on 28 June:

Welcome to this important ceremony.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the United Nations Population Award. Today we celebrate three decades of recognizing individuals and organizations for raising awareness of population questions — and finding solutions.

Population dynamics are central to sustainable development. We are now at a critical moment. We are in the final stretch of our campaign to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. And we are working to shape a vision for the post-2015 development agenda.

This is a once-in-a-generation chance to define how to deliver a more equal, more sustainable world for the 7 billion people who share it — and the 8 billion people projected to inhabit the planet by 2030. Population is not a matter of numbers. It is all about people — the choices that they make and the choices they are able to make.

We must empower individuals. We must protect their freedom, ability and right to make informed decisions. This will enable people to fulfill their potential. And that will advance whole societies.

Today we honor people and groups who are saving lives and supporting progress in public health.

I congratulate this year's institutional laureate, the International Islamic Centre for Population Studies and Research. As part of Al-Azhar University, this Centre is one of the most prestigious academic

institutions in the Muslim world. It is well regarded among Muslim communities as a reliable and credible source of information.

The Centre, which integrates population research, family planning and bioethics, works in all parts of the Islamic world, and in Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries. I particularly applaud the Centre's work to eradicate the deplorable practice of female genital mutilation or cutting. I also commend its essential work to dispel misconceptions about Islam through seminars, summits and workshops.

Please join me in congratulating our winners. Their important contributions are advancing our goal of peace, development and respect for human dignity.

I hope both laureates accept this Award as a symbol of our collective commitment to building a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.