



94-09-07: Statement of Fiji, H.E. Mr. Ratu Jo Nacola

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GOVERNMENT OF FIJI

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT (ICPD)

CAIRO - EGYPT

5-13 SEPTEMBER 1994

STATEMENT BY

HONORABLE RATU JO NACOLA

MINISTER FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MULTI-ETHNIC AFFAIRS

FIJI

In the General Debate

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Mr. President,

1. I wish first to thank you Mr. President and the people of Egypt for hosting this United Nations Conference on Population and sustainable development and for the hospitality and welcome given to the delegates from Fiji.
2. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Nafis Sadik, her staff at the I.C.P.D. Secretariat, UNFPA, and the many donors and agencies who have made our participation here possible
3. Mr. President Sir, Fiji is an island nation located in the middle of the south Pacific ocean about 1600 kilometres north-east of Australia. Fiji consists of over three hundred thirty (330) islands. ranging in size from tiny islets to ten thousand square kilometers , spread over 230,000 square kilometers of ocean . Our population numbers seven hundred seventy thousand with fifty percent being indigenous Fijians, forty four percent being of Indian descent and the rest made up of other race.
4. Although Fiji is a small island nation of the South Pacific it fully shares the global concerns on ppopulation and development being discussed at `this conference indeed, the realities of our small island nature highlight the need that we address the concerns on population and development, seriously and urgently.
5. Our concern for our growing population and the need for sustainable development is reflected in our participation and

contribution in various national, regional and international forums including the Earth Summit of 1992 and the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in Barbados just three months ago. We participated in the Port Vila Population and Development meeting for the Pacific Islands and Prepcom III in New York leading up to this International Conference on Population and Development.

6. Fiji's concern about our own rapid population growth was aroused in the early 1960's when it was realised that population was growing at an average annual rate of 3.3 percent. Such a high growth rate would have seen the doubling of the population in just 20 years. It was because of this that a family planning programme, that is credited as one of the most successful in the world, was introduced in 1962. Our population growth rate fell to 2.1 percent by 1976, 1.9 percent by 1986 and currently stands at 1 percent per annum which also reflects substantial emigration from Fiji in recent years.

7. Fiji is a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious country. Despite this diversity, there is almost universal consensus as well as popular national and political support for family planning programmes in view of the realisation that we cannot sustain a large and growing population.

8. The nature of the family planning programme in Fiji, right from the outset has been non-coercive, available to all couples irrespective of their marital status, and available to unmarried single people. In Fiji, we promote the artificial methods of contraception. However, we also cater for the needs of those who wish to use the natural family planning method. We ensure that the

service providers are knowledgeable about all methods in order to disseminate accurate information. But the final choice of contraception is left to the couples or the individuals concerned

9. Our current strategy calls for maintaining a population growth rate below 2 percent per year. This is to be achieved through the government's efforts in health and family planning service delivery and the effort of Non-Government Organisations in awareness raising.
10. Mr. President Sir, our population policies are not identified only with specifically demographic objectives but also with a great variety of measures which include universal primary and secondary education, the promotion of employment opportunities, higher literacy programmes, a health programme that seeks to improve the welfare of mothers and children as well as strategies to raise the status of women and involve youths in the development process.
11. A matter of great concern and priority for us is the provision of meaningful employment to the growing number of young people joining the labor force each year. The people who will enter the labor force over the next 15 years are already born. Human resource development is seen as important to provide the necessary skills to the youths for the workplace and society.
12. Fiji also shares the population and development concerns of many other small island countries of the South Pacific. These include our heavy dependence on a narrow range of resources and on international trade for our livelihood. Our increasing population density is leading to increasing pressures on our already scarce

resources and the fragile island ecosystems.

13. We are concerned about the global patterns of consumption and development which also threaten our livelihood. An example is global warming and associated climatic changes. Our islands are highly susceptible to the increasing frequency of storms, floods and droughts while some of our coastal areas and low-lying islands are threatened with complete destruction due to rising sea levels.

 14. Mr. President Sir, we have great expectations from this conference. We have come with the hope that this conference will result in a programme of action which will set out clear and practical strategies to ensure that we maintain our population and development levels which will ensure an even better future for the generations to come.

 15. We look forward to an international concensus on actions which are realistic and well targeted to address the challenges of populations and sustainable development. We appreciate the support of the international development agencies, donor organisations and partner countries in our efforts to address our population and development concerns. However, the success of our national and regional programmes to promote population and sustainable development will require continued and additional external technical and financial assistance for the forcible future. We ourselves have committed greater proportions of our finance and resources to such programmes. We are hopeful of similar commitments from the international community.

 16. I conclude Sir, with the best wishes for a successful conference.
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