

As written

|Speech for the Honorable Minister for Health – Fiji

Mr. President, country delegates, ladies and gentlemen. It is indeed a pleasure for me to be given this opportunity to address this very important forum.

Fiji is an independent democratic country in the South Pacific with an estimated population of 800,000 people. Even though we are relatively small in the context of world populations, we nonetheless have concerns in populations that are unique to countries in our region.

Fiji's concern for its population growth was raised well before ICPD when in 1987 a National Population and Family Planning Control Unit was established by Government.

There are two broad national goals relating to population. First is to limit the rate of population growth to that which is compatible with sustained improvement in standards of living. The second is to equip the population with a range of skills that meet the demand of an expanding economy.

Since Cairo, the Government of Fiji had adopted the reproductive health approach and accepted the main principles of the ICPD-POA. Attempts are being made to respond to the reproductive health needs adolescents while gender issues have become much more transparent as Government adopted formal policies to promote the role and status of women.

For reproductive health, the Government recognizes the advantages of an integrated reproductive health, family planning and sexual health approach in the context of primary health care.

Amongst the key issues in reproductive health to be addressed by Government after ICPD+5 include;

1. the high prevalence of reproductive tract infection/STD/HIV/AIDS
2. the low participation of men in family planning method utilization
3. the poor access of various rural communities to quality reproductive health services

The adolescents represent a section of our population that are often denied easy access to reproductive health services. The Fiji Government recognizes that there is a need for a more concerted effort with Non Government Organization, religious and community bodies alike to address the issues in reproductive health particularly, teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortion and sexual transmitted diseases.

I am pleased to record that Fiji has introduced of Family Life Education into schools hence providing a forum for the discussion of sexual health issues to adolescents.

Our plans for the next 5 years include;

1. the establishment of adolescent clinics for counseling, STD and family planning services
2. the strengthening of 'peer education' network and training programmes including innovative approaches to IEC and advocacy

The ICPD-POA identifies the empowerment of women their autonomy and full partnership in reproductive life as a critical factor in the achievement of gender equality and equitable sustained development.

Fiji's ratification of the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has contributed to an increased awareness on women legal status.

The Fiji Government's strategies aimed at gender equality include the review of laws and policies to ensure that gender biases are removed.

In relation to elimination of discriminatory practices against women, the Fiji Constitution was reviewed in 1996 as a matter of national interest. Amongst the legislative laws reviewed was one on the rights of citizenship that had been discriminatory to women. Furthermore, local NGOs have been instrumental in advocacy for legislative changes in laws governing areas related to rape and sexual assault.

Chapter 8 of the ICPD-POA is centered on the theme of improving women and child health morbidity and mortality. The high prevalence of nutrition or iron deficiency anaemia in Fiji has been chronic and the Fiji Government has embarked on a concerted effort to address the issue. Anaemia indeed has direct impact on child development, safe motherhood and a productive labor force. After ICPD+5, sincere effort will be made to introduce the world recognized control strategy of iron food fortification programme to Fiji.

Mr. President and fellow delegates, I would like to conclude and re affirm my Government's commitment to the implementation and achievement of goals and targets of the ICPD-POA.