

As written:‘

STATEMENT BY HER EXCELLENCY, THE VICE PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH, SOCIAL WELFARE AND WOMEN'S AFFAIRS FOR THE ICPD+5 MEETING, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS

BISMILLAH RAHMAN RAHIM

Mr. President

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Please allow me on behalf of His Excellency, President Yayha A. J. J Jammeh and the entire people of the Republic of The Gambia to extend my profound gratitude to the Government and people of The Netherlands for the hospitality accorded to me and my delegation since our arrival. I also seize this opportunity to thank UNFPA for convening this Forum.

Mr. President , the Program of Action of The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD has gone through 4 years of implementation in the Gambia with mixed results.

For example, The Gambia's high fertility of over 6 children per woman and an unprecedented population growth rate of 4.2% per annum – one of the highest in the world, continue to pose a great developmental challenge. As a young population that has a potential to double every 16 years, the growth rate if unchecked, will undermine our efforts in providing better quality of life for our citizens.

An important dimension of this growth is the persistently high net migration which grew from 0.6% to 1.4% per annum between 1983 and 1993, and is contingent upon political and economic stability of the countries in the West African Sub-region.

The adherence to international and regional protocols and conventions, which the Government cherishes, makes it difficulty to restrict entry into the country. However, plans are well under way to conduct a comprehensive Migration study to facilitate the formulation of a Migration Policy.

Although some socio-cultural factors continue to affect program implementation Mr. President, some significant achievements have been made including: reduction of infant mortality from 167 per 1000 to 92 per **1000**; **Total** fertility rate from 6.40 to 6.04; increase in contraceptive prevalence from 7 to over 14 per cent; age at first marriage has increased; reduction in Crude Death rate fell from 19 to 21 per 1000 with increase in life expectancy from 44 to 55 years; school enrolment and retention particularly for girls has increased significantly over the years

In line with the recommendations of the ICPD Program of Action, the National

Population Policy has been revised with the participation of all sectors of the Society including the **NGOs**.

Mr President ,The Government of The Gambia is committed to gender equality and empowerment but the difficulties in the operationalization of the concept and the deep-rooted socio-cultural practices and norms , have to some extent affected progress in this area . However, a Women In Development Policy and related Plan of Action is being finalized for adoption.

I wish to inform you Mr. President, that Government continues to accord high priority to reproductive health and has thus created the enabling environment for better access to information and services with increased partnership with **NGOs**. An important feature of this phenomenon is the integrated approach to service provision. One major constraint however, has been the operationalisation of the concept of integration within a decentralized framework.

Mr. President, in view of the importance of religious perspectives in addressing population issues, innovative strategies aimed at involving them more in the implementation of the population program with support of the Supreme Islamic and Christian Councils have been developed.

Mr. President, whilst significant efforts have been made by the Government and Development partners particularly UNFPA and The World Bank in the mobilization of resources, there still exist gaps in funding to adequately implement the population program. In addition,, we note with satisfaction the significant contribution of the **NGOs** particularly the International Planned Parenthood Federation through its local affiliate. Furthermore, I wish to inform this august gathering about the strengthened partnership between Government and Local **NGOs** who are implementing over 70 per cent of the Advocacy sub-program.

As we enter the new millennium, we face a number of challenges as mentioned earlier. However, a number of opportunities also exist that could contribute to the realization of policy objectives. These include: the continuous political will and support through the Population Commission; the active support of the Parliamentarians in the implementation of population activities; increased financial support of government for program implementation, particularly, the social sectors; increased partnership with **NGOs**; increasing number of females in decision making positions; increased efforts to generate resources locally to ensure sustainability of population activities; as well as, mainstreaming of women and youth into national development.

In concluding, **Mr.** President, I wish to call on Development Partners and Government to live-up to the commitments made in Cairo to enable us attain the goals of ICPD Program of Action.