

As written

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THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS**

Republic of Kiribati

(Presented by the Minister of Health, Hon. Baraniko Mooa)

Mr. President of the Hague Forum
The Executive Director of UNFPA, Dr. Sadik
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

Kiribati is one of the relatively smaller island countries, just a speck in the wide expanse of the Pacific ocean. If you decide to consult your world map the chances are that you would only find the name but not the land. To facilitate your mapping effort nevertheless, Kiribati is situated at the point where the International Date Line meets the equator. That should not be too difficult to accomplish.

Kiribati efforts in addressing Reproductive Health (RH) needs, women empowerment, gender equality and population and development issues in response to the International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action (ICPD-POA) have been implemented with various stages of successes (and failures). The results can be attributed to the combined efforts at both the national and regional levels with assistance from development partners. The message that clearly comes out is that at the national level there is still a need to canvass the support and collaboration from the highest level of decision making taking into consideration movements and transfer of staff and the political environment.

My Government has placed great emphasis on RH issues in line with global trends and focus, so that Reproductive Health, Family Planning, Sexual Health and reproductive rights will now be addressed through a more intergrated program-oriented approach thus making them prominent features of all our public heath programs.

The results of the work and partnership with non-government organization (NGOs) and the civil society have cast no doubt in our minds that they are our true partners in development and this recognition should be maintained and further strengthened.

At this stage I would like to mention, among others, the contribution of the following NGOs at the national level :

- The Kiribati Overseas Seaman's Union (KIOSU) for their active participation in the area of STD, HIV/AIDS prevention and control program directed at the seafarers,
- The Kiribati Family Health Association (KIFHA), a national NGO with the support of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), for their work in the area of women's health including reproductive health, family planning and STDs.
- The Federation for the Peoples of the South Pacific (FSP), who have contributed a lot at the community level in raising awareness on reproductive health issues, STD, HIV/AIDS and environment issues especially water and sanitation, and
- Various Churches, womens and youth groups.

Areas of specific concern in the implementation of ICPD-POA in Kiribati include the following :

1. Provision of reproductive health services or any services for that matter to islands scattered over 5 million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean has always been and will continue to be a daunting task for us.
2. Increasing rate of HIV infection. This is currently being addressed through the development of Interim Action Plan and later the Phase II development of the National Plan of Action (covering the period 1999-2001), with positive contribution from line ministries, NGOs, the media and church groups. Public awareness, education and women empowerment remain our only tools in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS.

3. Adolescent sexual health is a sensitive issue riddled with cultural taboos and traditional beliefs that are often associated with it. The majority of our adolescents are still learning and getting information on sexual behaviour and practices from their peers while parents and teachers are shying away from it. School-based curriculum have assisted but there is a long way to go. This is one component of the ICPD-POA that will probably take a long time to fully implement because as the saying goes “habit die hard”. In this respect the roles of counsellors, parents, school teachers, church groups and youth is fundamental both on a one to one basis and as a group.
4. Involvement of men in family planning has not always been a welcome move by the menfolk because they traditionally believe that this is the women domain and area of responsibility without realizing that it takes two to make a baby. This is especially true in the rural areas. While there are positive signs in urban areas that men are getting more and more involved we are still yet to witness their full participation.

Mr. President, Kiribati recognizes the need to improve specific components of Reproductive Health, population and development issues especially on adolescent reproductive health needs, improvement in the status of women through education, legal and socioeconomic recognition, involvement of men in family planning, strengthening of our Reproductive Health, IEC and advocacy component and involvement of the church. Political- commitment will continue to be cultivated and strengthened.

Bilateral and multilateral partners in development should continue to be receptive and accommodative to the needs of developing countries at the national, regional and international levels. It is without doubt that most of the developing countries lie along common tropical and equatorial latitude. What has prevented us from creating a strong partnership? Is it latitude or attitude? The point is if we have to develop a strong partnership then we must discard the issue of latitude and adopt the right attitude. We must keep in mind that the need for equity and equality in health is pervasive and therefore capable of crossing all latitudes, as well as political and geographical boundaries. Kiribati efforts in implementing the ICPD-POA has been done through the collaboration of line ministries, NGOs and bilateral and multilateral partners. My Ministry of Health cannot do it alone.

Success and failures in our commitment to ICPD-OOA must be heard in this forum because that is why we are here. Success stories from other Pacific Islands Countries have been used, replicated or modified to complement our efforts in the implementation of the ICPD-POA. Definitely this international forum will further add to a rich mix of experiences and successes from other parts of the world, and these too will be used to complement our effort.

Mr. President, last but not the least, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to UNFPA for inviting us to attend this very important meeting. I also take this opportunity to thank the people and the Government of the Netherlands for their warm hospitality and their commitment to the cause by hosting this international forum.

Thank you Mr. President