

**Statement to The Hague Forum, 8-12 February 1999**

**As written:**



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT BY  
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THE HAGUE INTERNATIONAL FORUM  
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Mr. President.

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Malaysian delegation would like to express our congratulations to your election as President of the Forum and our sincere appreciation to the Government of the Netherlands and UNFPA for organising this forum.

Almost five years ago in Cairo, we debated on new concepts and approaches in the realm of population and development. We discussed ‘Reproductive Health and Rights’; ‘Gender Equity and Equality’; putting people in the centre of population concerns; and we committed ourselves to putting these terms into reality to improve the quality of lives of men, women, families and communities. This week, we meet to share our experiences, constraints and successes so that together we can move faster, more effectively and efficiently to meet the yet many unmet needs of our people.

Mr. President,

Malaysia is fortunate to have an enabling environment that has facilitated a favourable political, economic and social framework upon which we have emplaced related policies and strategies and making necessary legislative and institutional changes.

In this regard, we take full recognition and **cognisance** of the plurality of our society where people from diverse cultural, religious and ethnic background, live in harmony, free from discrimination and are able to exercise their own choices. National unity, tolerance and living in a society that is democratic, liberal, caring and infused with strong moral and ethical values are national aspirations which have been ingrained in our socio-economic development plans and Vision 2020.

Mr. President.

Though policies for a balanced, equitable and sustainable development were already implemented before ICPD, Cairo and later Beijing, gave us the opportunity to pursue specific and more complex issues. The Seventh Malaysia Plan starting 1996 paved the way for the Social Agenda as the national priority, and realised through the formulation of a Cabinet Committee on Social Issues and implemented through a Social Action Plan and a special budgetary allocation. This year, the Women's Development Plan has been given priority with a further allocation of RM 20 million for programmes on Female Literacy including Legal Literacy and Empowerment? protection and support for single women-headed households, those in poor and vulnerable situation and initiatives for gender mainstreaming. Protection of women from all forms of violence and awareness of their rights are being addressed through the Domestic Violence Act, while protection of children and young persons including sexual exploitation and exposure to moral danger is being strengthened through a comprehensive Child Act.

Mr. President,

Reproductive health services including family planning have been integrated and are available, accessible and affordable within existing healthcare system, both public and private. The public sector provides for free contraceptives based on choice of methods, without coercion or discrimination Hence, Malaysia is looking into alternative delivery systems based on the broader human development approach which cuts across social, psycho-social, cultural and client perspectives. To address the social consequences of changing lifestyles and behaviour such as unwanted pregnancies and HIV/AIDS, intervention beginning within the family has been identified as a major strategy. A National Study on Adolescent Reproductive Health in 1996 has formed the basis for multi-sectoral intervention which includes advocacy, education, counselling and training on adolescent development, motivation and making correct choices. Even as I speak, the public debate on Reproductive Health Education for school children is going on at home.

Mr. President,

Malaysia recognises that the government alone cannot manage the effective implementation of Cairo's goals. Regular dialogues and consultations with advocacy groups, private sector and community-based organisations are held in the design, formulation and implementation of

many of the programmes. Yearly grants to NGOs are allocated to ensure that programmes and services ultimately reach the various target groups.

Mr. President.

Malaysia has progressed but we realised that we have to improve further. The economic downturn is affecting us, but the government has taken early actions to revive the economy, to protect those that are likely to be adversely affected and to maintain adequate budget for education, health, social protection and rural development.

Although a 20 % budget cut across the board was directed in July 1998, negotiations were allowed for basic social services including health, education and poverty eradication leading to the necessary budgets being reinstated. We are pleased to report that population and reproductive health programmes have not been adversely affected and that people are able to access themselves to quality health care, food and housing.

We will continue our utmost to protect our people from the consequences of the economic downturn and will enhance self-help initiatives to improve their livelihood. Skill training and retraining and micro-credit schemes under the **Amanah Ikhtiar programmes** has been implemented to uplift their economic status and self confidence.

In order to optimise available resources, the public sector has extended into smart partnerships and strategic alliances with the private sector and has resulted in joint infrastructure and programme development for identified social development projects such as the 'Caring Complex' – a complex for disadvantaged women and children. We are also fortunate that we are able to carry on our institutional capacity building and human resource development for our population and related projects and to ensure gains made such as in safe motherhood and reduction of maternal mortality are not jeopardised.

Mr. President,

I end by reaffirming Malaysia's commitment to make the Cairo's goals a reality and to give people the choice, freedom and dignity they deserve.

Thank You.