

As written

Statement by

Hon. Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, Minister of Planning and National Development

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honour and privilege for me and my delegation to be here in this beautiful and historic city of the Hague which symbolizes global traditions of peace, harmony and intellectual fulfillment. It is most befitting that we have you Mr. President to guide us through the deliberations of this important Forum. Your dedication, foresight and vision have always inspired us all.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to you Mr. President and through you to the Government and people of Netherlands for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to me and members of my delegation. It is also a great pleasure to congratulate and recognise the pivotal role of Dr. Nafis Sadiq, the Executive Director of UNFPA, in conceptualizing the principles of ICPD and organising this Forum.

Mr. President, the Maldives is a small island developing state with a population just over a quarter million - perhaps a size that many would not consider problematic at the global level. However, the particular problems of smallness including the geo-physical characteristics of the islands, the geographical dispersion of the population and limited natural resources, pose many challenges to development. At the same time, being a small open economy, patterns of global consumption and population growth present many environmental, social and economic challenges.

The Maldives is presently going through the initial stage of the demographic transition with high fertility and low mortality, and a growth rate of 2.8 per cent. At the present rate of growth, the population will double by the year 2015. With limited availability of land, this growth would produce a population density that would be comparable to those found

in countries with high population concentrations. Therefore accommodating the growing population, and achieving stabilization, are the dual challenges facing the Maldives.

Maldives views population issues as an integral part of overall development. As such, many of the goals and objectives of ICPD find expression in the goals and objectives of national development plans. And the provision of health and education, housing, income and employment as well as environmental management becomes crucial elements of the country's population strategy. The government recognizes the critical importance of the people's participation in developing and implementing national strategies, and strongly encourages the active involvement of NGOs and community based organisations in this process. Since ICPD Maldives has taken many initiatives in further strengthening the holistic nature of our population policy.

Mr. President. The family, indeed, is the primary social unit. As such, we believe that the institution of the family must remain focus of all development programmes. In the same way, the changing nature of the family structure, which is becoming increasingly nuclearised, is fully recognised in formulating population strategies. These changes have important implications for the role of women within, and out side the family. And, efforts are being made to empower them to make informed decisions with respect to their reproductive health, careers, and family life. The reproductive health approach of the Maldives emphasises 'a life cycle perspective, where awareness, and education programmes seek to raise the age of marriage, provide counseling on youth and adolescent problems.

Working within this framework, the Maldives has carried a number of specific programmes, in the areas of health services delivery, counseling, family planning and awareness raising, with special attention to maternal and child health. Population education has been successfully incorporated in the formal curriculum. Awareness programmes are being organised through the national radio, media and community organisations.

Increasing the participation of women in the process of development, both as participants and beneficiaries, has also remained an important policy concern in the Maldives. A country wide institutional framework for undertaking programmes aimed at addressing gender issues is in place. Women's committees are well established at the community level and enjoy a supportive relationship with the concerned Government authorities. A national policy on women, incorporating a broad range of gender issues, is now being finalized. Further, the Government is working on new legislation that would ensure greater protection and child care support for single mothers.

The Government is presently in the process of establishing a population coordination mechanism within the Ministry of Planning and National Development, with the responsibility to coordinate the planning and implementation of the national population strategy. This would ensure that population concerns are fully reflected in all relevant development programmes across sectoral boundaries. Work on developing a clear and wide ranging population policy that addresses that diverse concerns of population and development are also underway.

Mr. President. The Maldives has made significant progress in achieving the goals of population and development. But many hurdles still confront us. The wide dispersal of the population across the archipelago poses serious challenges in our quest for equitable, balanced and sustainable development. Most importantly, the lack of scale economies increases the cost of providing basic services and imposes a heavy fiscal burden on the Government

Along with reproductive health concerns, Maldives is compelled to focus on linkages between population and environment. The uneven nature of population distribution and urban migration are some of the pressing issues in this regard. The capital of the Maldives, Male', is presently home to a quarter of the country's population. This has increased the demand for land and housing as well as for urban services and recreation facilities. To meet this demand the Governments has embarked on the creation of settlements near Male'. This entails resettlement of uninhabited islands and the creation

of new islands through reclamation of existing lagoons. At the same time, the Government also promotes regional development, with the objective of increasing income and employment opportunities, out side the capital region and revert the tide of internal migration.

Mr. President, as we all acknowledge, resource mobilisation is a central issue in the implementation of our programmes. The Maldives currently allocates more than a quarter of the development budget on social development, of which education and health share a significant part. Substantial investments are also being made in infrastructure development. However, additional resources are required in order to successfully implement population and development policies and achieve the objectives of national development.

In this regard, however, it is with great regret that I note today, that many of the industrially advanced countries are yet to meet their 0.7 per cent ODA targets. Many developing countries, including the Maldives, are in fact experiencing decreasing levels of external assistance. I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to call for a renewed commitment to meet the agreed targets for Official Development Assistance.

Mr. President. As we review the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, let us not forget its holistic nature and global dimensions. There is a need to reconsider patterns of global consumption and resource use, which reflects the wide disparity that exists between nations. It is important to approach the issue of poverty and unequal access to resources at global, regional and national levels.

It is clear that much progress has been made in reaching the goals of ICPD. It is also clear that strong bonds of partnerships need to be developed between civil society organisations and the government in addressing the challenges of population and development. It is further imperative that we fully utilize this opportunity to create greater understanding and international cooperation in achieving our common objectives and to fulfil our hopes and aspirations for a better world.

Thank you,
