

As written

SUMMARY OF SPEECH GIVEN AT THE HAGUE
FORUM ON MONDAY FEBRUARY 8.1999

Thank you, Madam Chair. My name is Peter **Purdy and I** am the Director of the **Margaret Sanger** Center International of Planned Parenthood of New York City, an U. S. non-governmental **organization** that has worked overseas for the past thirty years primarily in **Africa** and Asia. I would *like* to give some particular focus to one of the lessons learned during the past five years since the Cairo **Plan** of Action in **1994**, because it has particular relevance and importance to where we need to move in **the next millenium.**

During the past two days of the NGO forum and Youth forum which preceding this weeks meetings and, indeed, during the Cairo meetings, much discussion **has** been given to the topic of sexuality. As **an** international agency that has worked extensively in the field of reproductive **health** and sexuality education, we are more than aware that this word is problematic in terms **of trying to** implement **programs with the** endorsement **of decision-makers** and gate keepers in both the public and non-governmental sectors. Unhappily, it is badly misunderstood and misinterpreted by the most narrow of definitions. And we in the **field have** not taken **sufficient** time to define it as the total expression of who we are as human beings. **Nor have we taken** the time to link it in the most critical ways to the issues **of** gender equity, gender violence and even contraceptive decision making and reproductive rights – key themes cited in the Cairo Program of **Action.**

Thus, our agency's experience in the field has been one of **frequent** political resistance and, **often, professional** resistance to addressing this issue in primary and **secondary** school systems, in non-formal educational programs and in the health care service delivery systems. We are aware that we now have a world population, which includes over a **billion** adolescents, who increasingly worldwide have chosen to be sexually active. We have done little as parents or professionals to help them examine their options, **look** at risks associated with their choices and explore how the gender roles to which we have socialized them have, in fact, **generated the inequity** we keep speaking **about.**

For those of us, including **myself**, who have worked in this field for over 30 years, we are only now understanding how the issue of sexuality has always impacted **the** decisions **individuals** made about **contraception.** Unhappily, the **HIV** and **AIDS** impact have now made this clear. Let me cite an **example, In** numerous countries in **Africa, KAP** studies – that is knowledge, attitude and practice assessments – of adults now indicate high knowledge about contraceptives and their advantages and disadvantages. In some countries such as Namibia, these figures are in the **90%** percentile. There are similar high levels of knowledge about the use of some contraceptives to prevent the transmission of sexually **transmitted** disease to include HIV. Yet, practice levels within these same populations **is** often below 10%. Understanding this gap in the context of risk taking that might lead to death

presents a formidable challenge. Further understanding its impact on the issue of contraception for pregnancy prevention is even more breath **taking**. It is clear to many of us that we are **facing** major attitudinal barriers, **which** are deeply **rooted** in issues relating **to** sexuality.

I am therefore urging you as you review progress and lack of **progress** on the Cairo Program of **Action**, to **carefully** consider and support **future** strategies and activities that will take **the** time to define and emphasize the importance of sexuality **education** as a key **and** critical theme that ultimately influences not only individuals' reproductive health but the myriad of issues **relating** to gender relationships and gender equity. We **at** the Margaret **Sanger** Center International see this theme as one of the key challenges worldwide as we **all seek** to fully realize the **vision** of the Cairo agenda.