

Statement to The Hague Forum, 8-12 February 1999

As written:

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Five years ago, we left Cairo invigorated by the new agenda for action that we had endorsed. On behalf of the Government of Mongolia, I would like to express our highest appreciation to UNFPA and to the Government of the Netherlands for providing us this opportunity to meet and reflect on the progress made since then. I would like to congratulate UNFPA for the carefully-planned process that led to this Forum. We look forward to **this** dialogue of nations on the achievements and constraints we have faced in implementing a challenging programme of action.

Mongolia is, in many respects, a very distinctive country. It is a large country with harsh climate. Its population is small, with a relatively low growth rate and a very low density. Urban and semi-nomadic populations co-exist, and the population is scattered. All of these create challenges in providing basic social services to the entire population. Migration and urbanization are issues that are requiring increasing attention. Recently, fertility has declined, but mortality, in particular the mortality of children and mothers, is still too high. There is a significant gap between the knowledge of and behaviors concerning reproductive health. This is one of the causes of the country's high abortion rates.

Mongolia is lucky not to have experienced the HIV/AIDS epidemic to any significant extent. However, with a high incidence of STDs and a very young population, our Government acknowledges the potential risks. It understands the urgency of strengthening its programme on STD/HIV/AIDS to prevent the spread of infection. The Constitution of Mongolia recognizes equal **rights** for women and men. Women have high literacy rates and are well represented among students and professionals. For example, 70% of students in higher education are female. Yet, there are gender-related issues that need to be addressed. We need to increase male involvement in reproductive health decisions. and we need to address gender-related violence.

Since 1994, the Government of Mongolia has taken significant steps to create an enabling environment for the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. The Government has approved a population policy and has adopted a number of national programmes to promote the health and education of the population, including a National Programme on Reproductive Health, one on adolescents, and one on STD/HIV/AIDS. Task forces have been created to coordinate the implementation of **these** programmes; regional RH coordinators are now in place; research in Reproductive Health but also in other areas like aging and migration. are planned to broaden and deepen our understanding of the priority population issues in Mongolia.

Recently, the Government of Mongolia has started to involve NGOs in these activities and wants to involve the private sector as well. With its decentralization process, the Government is involving the lower levels of administration, strengthening partnerships and bringing the ICPD vision closer to the people.

These achievements and many others are already making a positive difference in improving the quality of the Reproductive Health services. However, still many challenges remain. We have a relatively extensive health and education system, but Reproductive Health indicators demonstrate that the quality of care needs to be significantly improved. In addition, we need to increase and better target access to information, counseling and services to serve the specific needs of remote populations and vulnerable segments of society such as adolescents. We need to identify the changes that are required in our institutional framework to facilitate the provision of integrated and quality Reproductive Health services. We need to develop a mechanism to better monitor progress, and to integrate lessons learned into our programmes and policies.

I am proud to say that we have in Mongolia a very strong political commitment to population and development issues, up to the highest level. However, the socio-economic and political transition we are going through requires dramatic changes in mind-sets and in terms of capacity-building. We are facing these challenges and many competing demands with limited human and financial resources. We recognize the critical need to be more strategic and cost-effective in our interventions. Hence, UNFPA's assistance, both technical and financial, is instrumental for Mongolia's well-being and is greatly appreciated.

We are pleased to be here with all of you as we seek to fulfill the Cairo commitment.

Thank you very much for your attention.