

Statement to The Hague Forum, 8-12 February 1999

As written:

Address

of

the Honourable Minister for Population and Environment

Mr. Ramesh Nath Pandey of Nepal

at the Hague Forum

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The Hague,

The Netherlands

International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (POA) Implementation in Nepal

Mr. Chairperson

Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to share with this august gathering, Nepal's experience in implementing ICPD Programme of Action. On behalf of His Majesty's Government of Nepal, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the organising committee for extending invitations to us to participate in this gathering. I would also like to express my thanks to the government of Netherlands for the warm hospitality extended to our delegation in this beautiful city of Hague.

Mr. Chairperson

As you may be aware, difficult terrain of Nepal poses major challenges to our developmental efforts. Until the 1950, Nepal had virtually no modern social and economic infrastructure. Economic linkages to the rest of the world were virtually non-existent. After the democracy in 1951, Nepal has achieved significant progress in providing basic infrastructure and social services to its people. Despite these achievements, an estimated 42 per cent of the population still live below the poverty line.

Mr. Chairperson

Nepal's total fertility rate is 4.6 and mortality is declining fast resulting in high rate of population growth. The 1991 census of Nepal yielded a population of 18.5 million with an average annual growth rate of 2.1 per cent between 1981 and 1991. If this trend continues, Nepal's population will double in 33 years.

Mr. Chairperson,

The ICPD Programme of Action represents a critical shift of focus from achieving demographic targets, mainly through the provision of family planning services, to an emphasis on improving individual quality of life. It has emphasised people's rights to reproductive health services that should be of quality, easily accessible, acceptable and convenient to all users.

Mr. Chairperson

Nepal was one of the 180 countries endorsing the ICPD Programme of Action in 1994. As a follow-up to the conference His Majesty's Government of Nepal has made several efforts to fulfil its commitment.

- At the highest level, National Population Committee was formed, chaired by the Prime Minister, which provides guidelines for formulating population policies and programmes in the country.
- Population and Social Committee in our parliament is responsible for advising and monitoring population and health related issues in the country.
- Following the Cairo Conference His Majesty's Government of Nepal established Ministry of Population and Environment (MOPE), Ministry of Women and Social Welfare (MWSW) and Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture in order to accelerate the programme of integrating women, youth and environment with population issues.
- The National Planning Commission of Nepal has also developed Five-year and Twenty year plans to integrate population and development.
- In Nepal both the government and the NGO sector are working side by side to implement the ICPD Programme of Action.

- In 1996, the Ministry of Health developed Reproductive Health Strategy with emphasis on integrated Rural Health Care Package containing :

- 1 family planning;
- 2 safe motherhood including child health (new born care);
- 3 prevention and management of complications of abortion;
- 4 Reproductive Tract Infections/ Sexually Transmitted Diseases / Human Immunodeficiency Syndrome and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS);
- 5 prevention and management of infertility;
- 6 adolescent reproductive health; and
- 7 problems of elderly, especially women.

In order to deliver the package effectively, the Ministry of Health has established health infrastructure that reaches people at the grass root level. Every village in the country today has a basic health facility so that people have easier access to service delivery.

Mr. Chairperson

Traditional socio-cultural value system prevailing in Nepal poses serious challenge to women's empowerment. Despite this, we have strived to pass two bills in the Parliament, **Parental Property Inheritance Bill for Girl Children** and **Pregnancy Protection Bill (abortion)**. At present, both these bills are under consideration by the parliament. Enactment of these bills will significantly enhance empowerment of women in the country.

Mr. Chairperson

Poverty stands in the way of promoting quality of life in Nepal and that of women in particular. Poverty, low status, young age pregnancy, frequent pregnancy, malnutrition, illiteracy particularly among women and the lack of freedom for the termination of unwanted pregnancy contribute to high maternal mortality in Nepal.

Despite being a resource poor nation, Nepal has made efforts to increase budgetary allocation for health and social sector in the past few years. The health sector budget has increased from 3.5 per cent of the total expenditure in 1991/92 to 6.0 per cent in 1996/97. Even this increase has been inadequate for realising the goals made in Cairo. I am sure, this is the case of many developing countries. This is the context in which international commitment made during ICPD in Cairo becomes even more vital.

Mr. Chairperson,

After ten months, we will be entering a new millenium with many challenges. But the biggest challenge of all will be to improve the quality of life of more than two billion people of the world who will enter the new millinium but still bereft of even their basic needs fulfilling their basic needs will be the major challenge in the next century. This is where we must focus at.

Mr. Chairperson

We as policy makers and implementers of ICPD Programme of Action in our respective countries find this forum extremely useful to share our experiences and the lessons learned. The deliberations that have been made by many delegates are extremely useful and thought provoking. I am sure these deliberations will help us chart our actions in future.

Nepal is a party to various international commitments to improve the quality of human life on our planet. Nepal is serious to its commitments and has followed-them. at the national level through various actions.

It is our earnest hope and desire that this ICPD follow-up deliberation will help recommit the international community once again to strive towards global welfare.

Thank you.