

As written

**THE HAGUE FORUM
8-12 February 1999**

**STATEMENT BY
Mrs. Fifita Talagi, Head of the Delegation
of
The Government of Niue**

Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to thank UNFPA for organising this meeting and the Government of the Netherlands for hosting it.

Niue is a single coral island, 19 kilometres long and 18 kilometres wide. It has a land area of 259 square kilometres. **As it is just on the eastern side of the international dateline, it will be one of the few countries in the world to farewell the twentieth century and to welcome in the new millennium.**

Niue is a self governing state under a constitution in free association with New Zealand. The country manages its own affairs while New Zealand handles foreign affairs and defence on request.

The people of Niue are **Polynesians. They are also New Zealand citizens** and are allowed to travel freely to New Zealand and back. Today, almost 18,000 Niueans live in New Zealand. The 1997 Census counted the population of the country at **2,088** people resulting in the population density declining to 8 people per square kilometre from 10 people in 1986.

The major component of population in **Niue has** been migration to New Zealand. As a result, the fertility rate has declined from 4.86 in 1986 to 3.5 in **1997. This factor, coupled with the** rise in life expectancy to 74 years for both men and women indicate that an increase in the elderly age group means that dependency is on the rise.

As the country's population continues to decline, the Government has established a National Population and Development Committee to formulate policies to discourage Niueans currently living in Niue from emigrating and to encourage Niueans living in New Zealand to return and resettle in Niue. But as incentives for their return have been unsuccessful so far, the government for the time being is concentrating on those who are still on the island.

Education is compulsory and is provided free of charge to everyone from 5 to 16 years of age. The health status of the people in Niue is good as health services are provided free to all citizens of the country. They also have 100% access to safe water and sanitation.

In response to the ICPD POA and the Healthy Islands concept promoted in the Pacific Islands, the Government of Niue has established The Moui Olaola Committee which is made up of representatives from government agencies and non government organisations responsible for health related programmes on the island.

The purpose of the Committee is to promote awareness of the physical, social and economic impact of health problems on the individual, the family, the community and the nation; and to assist the people make healthy choices with regards to lifestyle, behaviour and attitude through improved knowledge on sexual health, family planning, gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The establishment of the Committee meant that programmes that were implemented in isolation in the past are integrated into one national health programme. The new Committee also involves more NGOs; and the private sector for the first time.

Programmes that have been implemented by the Committee so far include the training of health educators, the promotion of awareness programmes on STDs and HIV/AIDs, a litter free

environment; the impacts of alcohol and substance abuse; and the review of public health and environmental policies and legislation.

Niue has already ratified CEDAW and since 1994 and particularly after the World Conference on Women in 1995, the provision of awareness programmes on the convention itself, women's human and legal rights and violence against women has continued. Volunteer counsellors have been selected and trained and a counselling centre for women has been established.

Women's participation in national and local government is high. The women also play a significant role in agriculture production and are the driving force behind village communities, churches and the family. They are also active in maintaining cultural and promoting income generating activities.

Although a lot of work has been made on gender equality and the empowerment of women, one of the major constraints is still the minimal male involvement in the family due to the lack of awareness of the importance of co-parenting and sometimes to traditional practices of the Niuean society. Although two weeks paternity leave for men is provided, not all men qualify for this. It is now planned for them to participate in health and human rights programmes normally provided for women so they can become sensitized to family issues.

It has been alluded to earlier that primary health care in Niue is good because the people have 100% access to health services. However, there are still sections in the community that are not receiving relevant health information from health educators.

Our young people who are still at school are missing out because schools do not provide sexual and reproductive health education. The challenge now is for policy makers and parents to agree to the integration of reproductive health education in to the school curriculum.

To conclude, Niue's major problem is under population. The lack of **tertiary** education and a range of employment opportunities will continue to contribute to the departure of young people from the country. However, health service delivery, education and communication facilities should be of the highest possible level in order to ensure a quality standard of living for those who wish to live and enjoy Niue's way of life.