

Statement to The Hague Forum, 8-12 February 1999

As written:

GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER OF POPULATION WELFARE FOR PLENARY SESSION OF ICPD+5 (AGENDA ITEM NO. 4)

**Mr. President,
Executive Director UNFPA,
Excellencies,
Distinguish Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

First of all, on behalf of the Pakistan delegation I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the President and members of the Bureau on their election to conduct the proceedings of this important Forum. I assure them of the cooperation of the Pakistan delegation in making this Forum a success. It is a great pleasure for me to be at The Hague Forum for ICPD+5. I congratulate UNFPA for hosting this momentous Conference five years after the ICPD in Cairo. I would like to congratulate Dr. Nafis Sadik for her dedicated efforts and outstanding contribution in the cause of population during the last few decades.

I am pleased to announce that Pakistan has made substantial progress in the area of Population and Development since the ICPD. At the same time, I would like to point out that our own domestic and geo-political situation is responsible for our progress and achievements of the last five years. We can today, at least, hope for rapid demographic change which will substantially alleviate the pressure of our previously high population growth rate and help us to meet our development goals. At the same time, we are an integral part of the global system and, therefore, would continue to need technological and financial support from international partners to achieve our goals of development and prosperity.

Pakistan was a willing signatory of the ICPD Plan of Action in 1994 in Cairo. However, unlike many other countries, Pakistan has less donor support which has slowed its efforts to implement the ICPD-PoA at the desired level. Pakistan's social and demographic profile has remained low for some time. Our total fertility rate and the population growth rates were high for decades and our social sectors lagged behind despite substantial economic growth. Notwithstanding the long history of having a Population Welfare Program, Pakistan's achievement was not satisfactory in the past. Our annual growth rate was around 3.0 per cent and contraceptive prevalence rate merely 12 per cent as estimated in 1991. Literacy was low, particularly for women, merely 16 per cent.

The situation has changed dramatically since ICPD. In the recent Population Census of 1998, we have an average inter-censal rate of 2.6 per cent and our current growth rate is estimated at 2.3 per cent per annum. This decline is attributed to the changes in marriage patterns and rapid reduction in marital fertility. Contraceptive prevalence rates, rising in the 90's at 2 per cent per annum, have gone up from 18 per cent in 1994 to 27 per cent in 1998. Fertility has significantly declined in the 1990's. Literacy has risen to 45 per cent in 1998. This reduces demographic pressure to some extent, which impeded economic development in the past few decades. While there is progress to report on the socio-demographic front, we are faced with severe resource constraints. Pakistan has scarcer resources to allocate at a time when they are most urgently required.

Let me elaborate by first pointing out how Pakistan has tried to implement the requirements of the ICPD agenda. There is no doubt that the ICPD agenda has influenced shifts in policy, in

taking us in new directions, and in broadening the Population agenda. However, we have done so maintaining the voluntary nature of our existing Population Program and within the religious and cultural values that we wish to uphold. In fact, we have adapted the principles of the ICPD within our own social, economic and cultural realities.

Mr. President, the present Government in Pakistan, led by Prime Minister Nawar Sharif, attaches great importance to addressing population issues confronting Pakistan and has taken bold initiatives. *The first area* in which we have implemented the ICPD recommendations, is, by developing and announcing a new Population Development Policy. Thus far we did not have a well-enunciated Population policy. The essential message of the policy is to improve the quality of life of Pakistanis through a reduction in rapid population growth. It has been recognized that the way to achieve this is by providing high quality and readily accessible reproductive health and family planning services to meet the needs of individual couples. The Policy also stresses an enabling environment for bringing about social and demographic change, particularly through improvements in education and status of women. A concerted effort is therefore required to tackle the issue of Population and Development in its various forms so we have emphasized the collaborative efforts of a broad range of stakeholders, which include public and private institutions and NGOs in an emerging new relationship. The policy recognizes that population and development must be the responsibility of all citizens of Pakistan and, therefore, the policy addresses both the government as well as civil society.

Important elements of the Policy, which are directed towards the public sector program, have been incorporated in the Government's Ninth Five Year Plan launched in July, 1998. This is to

ensure that population factors and concerns are appropriately incorporated into the process of development planning. Population and development interrelationships and inter-linkages have been stressed not only in the Population sector, but also other closely related sectors such as Education, Health, Employment and Women's Development.

Another initiative of our Government, which has direct bearing on Population and Development, is our Social Action Program. This Program is designed to provide uplift to the social sectors, Population, Education, Primary Health Care, and Rural Water Supply and Sanitation are the five components of the Social Action Program.

New partnerships have been set up within the country and internationally. An Inter-Ministerial Committee on Population and Development comprising of the Ministers of Health, Population, Welfare, Education, Information, Religious Affairs and Finance was set up in 1997. The Committee is chaired by the Prime Minister, and meets regularly to review the progress on Population activities. Internationally, we have become an active member of Partners in Population and Development under the South-South initiative.

The second area of focus in the period after the ICPD is accomplishing the transition to reproductive health including family planning. As I have pointed out at the outset, we have made substantial progress in improving our reproductive health indicators. The total fertility rate has fallen, contraceptive prevalence rate has risen and infant and mortality rates have registered appreciable decline. However, our reproductive health indicators continue to require substantial improvement to attain the level of the developed countries.

In the post ICPD period, we have launched several new initiatives to increase the quantum of services while seeking to improve the quality of services. Additional reproductive health services have been established while existing systems of service delivery have been strengthened in rural and impoverished urban communities, through community-based organizations. About 50,000 women workers are now in place with the prime purpose of motivating, counselling and providing services to women at their doorstep.

The Ministries of Population Welfare and Health, have achieved some degree of functional integration of services for which we have sought to design a common reproductive health package to be adopted by the relevant service providers. Provincial and district level committees are operating to achieve this functional integration, so as to maximize efficiency.

The most notable achievement in extending service delivery, however, has been the partnership and involvement of NGOs and civil society. We have received encouraging results from two social marketing companies which have been expanding reproductive health services in the urban areas, and undertaking training programmes while effectively marketing contraceptives through commercial outlets and through registered medical practitioners.

Another partnership established is between the NGOs and the Government. NGOs are contributing significantly to extending a range of reproductive health care services throughout the country. The National Trust for Population Welfare has played a positive role in providing financial support to the NGOs. The Trust is managed by the NGOs themselves and is an autonomous organization, resourced by the Government of Pakistan as well as international donors..

We are also making efforts to improve the quality of care through better training and supervision of service providers and increased counselling of potential clients. We are seeking to deal with the issue of HIV/AIDS and STDs, prevalence of, which is fortunately low so far in Pakistan. Lastly, in the area of reproductive health, we have begun to address ourselves to men, both young and mature and are seeking to promote male understanding of reproductive health issues. We are mounting an increased effort in informing and counselling men about family planning issues to elicit their increased involvement.

The third main area in which we have tried to implement the ICPD PoA is by improving our ranking in Gender Equity Index (GEI) through enhanced empowerment of women. Pakistan's Constitution clearly provides equal rights to men and women. We have ratified the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) in 1996. We are also involved in the follow-up of the Beijing Conference. A Commission on the Status of Women has reviewed the situation and presented its report. Its recommendations will have far reaching impact on women's empowerment through increased opportunities for education, employment and enhanced participation in the political process. Other main areas of implementation of the ICPD PoA are education, particularly population education, environment and sustainable development.

Now, I turn to the burning issue of resource availability for implementing the ICPD Programme of Action. You would all agree that the ICPD PoA is ambitious since it covers a wide range of issues. The full implementation of the ICPD agenda requires resources that are beyond the capacity of a developing country like Pakistan. In 1994, all Nations had agreed that greater

financial allocation was needed **from** both the donor and recipient countries. However, the international community has seriously lagged behind its funding commitments made at the ICPD. Despite its resource constraints, Pakistan has increased its public investment in health and family planning. In addition, substantial investments are being made by the private sector. Annual Government outlays to the Ministry of Population Welfare have increased more than five fold between 1988 and 1998. But donor assistance has not matched our requirements.

It will be difficult for Pakistan to maintain the current rate of effort because of a small economy in relation to the size of our population. We face a resource crunch which could impede our progress towards achieving our demographic transition. It would be unfortunate if the recent breakthrough is not rapidly built upon due to resource constraints. A substantial increase in donor support is, therefore imperative if we are to sustain Pakistan's efforts in implementing the ICPD mandate.

Mr. President, despite our financial constraints, Pakistan pledges to maintain the momentum of its progress and also to accelerate it. Both Government and civil society have a clearer grasp of the task ahead and therefore there is a stronger will to address our development issues. The most immediate challenge is to meet the unmet demand for reproductive health and family planning services. If half the demand is met over the next five years, we will have achieved our demographic transition. Further reduction in maternal mortality and infant and child mortality remains our highest priority. Another challenge is to enable the nation's youth in making the transition to adulthood better equipped which is achievable through improved education and employment opportunities. We are trying to empower women, to reduce gender inequities in

education and employment and the reduction of poverty form the core of the future plan of action for Pakistan.

Mr. President, I do think we are ready to accept challenges as I am confident that we are on the right track. Our success will depend ultimately on our ability to operate despite resource constraints, which could however be relieved immeasurably by a more generous and enhanced donor support to guarantee sustaining our present momentum. We are committed to dropping population growth below 2 per cent per annum within the next three years, and to coming down to 1.3 per cent within eight years. We hope, the affluent Nations of the World will assist us in meeting our commitment.
