

As written:

The Hague Forum

The Palestinian National Authority

**Statement By
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**Mr. President,
Honorable Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It gives me a great pleasure to be among you, today, to represent Palestine in this important Forum and to sum up the Palestinian experience in implementing the ICPD Program of Action.

H.E. President Yaser Arafat has asked me to extend salute to our host, Her Majesty the Queen, the Government and people of the Netherlands, the organizers and participants in this very important gathering. H. E. has asked me to express gratitude to UNFPA, under the able leadership of Dr. Nafis Sadik, for supporting us in our efforts to implement the ICPD program of action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The PLO has made major strides to bring peace and stability to the Middle East by signing the Oslo agreements with Israel. We have hoped that the peace process will put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people, to allow them to exercise their rights of self-determination, independence, and statehood, and to establish comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arab World.

We have hoped that the peace process will pave the way for reconciliation and partnership between Israelis and Palestinians. However, after five years of continued efforts by the PLO to honor its part of the interim agreement, we are all being held hostage to the policies of colonialism and expansionism of the current Israeli government. Unfortunately, the peace process is now on the verge of breaking apart, and we are witnessing today the passing away of one of its main heroes. We offer our deepest condolences to the people and Government of Jordan for this great loss.

Given these conditions of uncertainty in the peace process, the efforts to implement the ICPD Programme of Action in Palestine will always be subject to the political conditions on the ground.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

We take pride in reaffirming the unwavering commitment of the Palestinian National Authority and civil society institutions to implementing the ICPD Programme of Action. It is, indeed, significant that reaching the landmark Cairo agreement almost five years ago coincided with the birth of the Palestinian National Authority.

The ICPD goals were fully taken into account in the institutional and policy arrangements made by the Palestinian National Authority. The current Palestinian Development Plan underscores the importance attached to population issues.

Promoting women's health, including reproductive health, has been the central theme of the Palestinian Health Plan. The Women's Health and Development Department was established within the Ministry of Health to be responsible for developing and monitoring the implementation of reproductive health policies and coordinating the reproductive health programs that are supported by various donors and UN agencies.

Information, education and communication strategies are being developed to promote reproductive health and reproductive rights and the empowerment of women.

In its efforts to achieve gender equity and equality, the Palestinian National Authority has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Legal changes have been introduced to promote the status of women and to increase participation in the decision-making process. Women's departments have been established in all ministries to ensure that gender concerns are fully incorporated into development programs.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics was founded and succeeded in launching the first population and housing census in 1997. The census is the cornerstone for developing benchmark indicators for

monitoring the implementation of development programs and ICPD Programme of Action.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our commitment to the ICPD Program of Action is hampered by very difficult economic and political conditions created by Israeli policies. Such policies impose restrictions on movement of persons and goods between Gaza and the West Bank, as well as on employment and the import and export of Palestinian goods. This is in addition to the prevailing sociocultural barriers to women empowerment and the insufficient technical, managerial and human resource capabilities of Palestinian institutions. There are, as always, competing priorities for resources from sectors other than population and reproductive health.

I must admit that, although we have made significant achievements, we still have a long way to go to effectively implement the ICPD Program of Action. Developing population policies, particularly those aiming at further promoting the status of women; ensuring nationwide access to quality reproductive health care; and integrating population variables into development plans come at the forefront of our priorities.

In conclusion, during the last five years, the quality of life has deteriorated in Palestine, more households are living below the poverty line, especially in Gaza, and more people are skeptical of the future of the peace process.

While reaffirming our commitments to the ICPD goals, we call on Israel to provide favorable conditions for the implementation of these goals by lifting all restrictions imposed on the Palestinians, respecting their basic human rights, and ceasing settlement activities.

Despite the grim realities in our land, we are determined to achieve ICPD goals, and we have the strong conviction that we can do so. We have the will and count on your support to help meet our needs and make our dreams come true.

Long Live Palestine