

Statement to The Hague Forum, 8-12 February 1999

As written:

**THE COUNTRY STATEMENT
ON THE ICPD POA**

BY

MASAO M. UEDA
MINISTER OF HEALTH
REPUBLIC OF PALAU

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I. NATIONAL POPULATION POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

- ✓ The Palau National Congress (Olbiil Era Kelulau) adopted last year the National Master Development Plan (for the next 20 years). One of the strategies in this plan is to increase human resource training and development. Among the major groups that had input into the preparation of the Plan are the Traditional Women Leaders and various Womens' Organizations.

- ✓ In June 1996, the President of the Republic, by an executive order, created the Palau National Committee on Population and Children. This Committee has developed the National Population Policy (Population and Development: Toward a Palau National Policy for Sustainable Human Development). This policy covers a wide range of population issues, including many of the main concerns of the International Conference On Population and Development (ICPD).

- ✓ The National Population Committee has also been given the responsibility for monitoring and measuring the progress of the population policy recommendations. Monitoring of issues related to reproductive health is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health collaborates with the Bureau of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice and various Women's Organizations to monitor the progress of the
- other concerns of ICPD.

- ✓ The major constraint with respect to population policy is that the Policy itself has not been adopted by the Palau National Congress. While hearing have been held in the responsible committees of the two houses of the national congress, the policy has yet to be officially adopted.
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The National Population Committee has recently met with the President of the Republic to garner his support in the adoption of the population policy. They got the needed support from the President. He wants to reintroduce the Population Policy to the National Congress for consideration and adoption.

- ✓ The government is committed to implementing the National Master Development Plan. This is an opportunity to integrate recommendations in the Population Policy into the implementation activities. Recently, the National Congress has passed the minimum wage bill, which is another step forward in the gender equality issue.

11. Gender, Equality and Empowerment of Women

✓ The Government personnel policy prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age and disability. As mentioned above, the minimum wage bill was recently passed and signed into law. Women have equal rights and access to Health, Education, Employment and Public Offices. They have equal rights to decision regarding family planning. Abortion is prohibited in Palau unless it is deemed medically necessary to save the mother's life. A bill has been proposed to deal with the issue of prostitution.

As mentioned, among the major contributors to the development of the National Master Development Plan were the traditional women leaders and other women's organizations. The Committee on Population and

Children is chaired by a woman who is also the Director of the Bureau of Human Resources Training and Development. Women in Palau holds key positions in the National and State Government. The Director of Clinical Services in the Ministry of Health is a woman. The Maternal and Child Health, Family Planning, the Breast & Cervical Cancer, and Victims of Crime programs are managed by women, the administrators for Public Health, Primary Care and Behavioral Health are women. The chief of the Division of Human Resources Development within the Ministry of Health is also a women. It is a women who chairs the committee on health in the senate of the Palau National Congress. Thus, women in Palau have great involvement in the planning, managing and monitoring of reproductive health care services.

The government through its Bureau of Women's Interest within the Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, has collaborated with the states through women state representatives, traditional women leaders - the nation-wide woman's organization and other NGOs, to promote the empowerment of women. **Women's rights in Palau are guaranteed and protected in the constitution.**

- Involvement of women in planning, managing, and monitoring of reproductive health-care services, is not an issue in Palau. However, while gender equality has not been an issue in Palau, males assuming equal responsibilities for the family has been an issue.
- ✓ The challenges with respect to the issues just discussed are not necessarily government's sole responsibility to deal with. It is recognized in Palau that the problems are

largely based on culture. **Women in the Palauan life hold very high profile, esteem and responsibilities** within the context of a **matrilineal society**. Their roles are specific and are different from the male counterpart. They have never been deemed to be of lesser value or leaders - just of a different category. While they hold the **sole power of choosing or appointing** the chief, they would never become a chief. In the modern society, they are not only choosing the president but may become the president. The challenges for the modern government and modern society is in reconciling the minds of the civil society that there are nothing incompatible in the old and the new paradigms. One does not have to give way so the other may exist. It is only that certain matters need to be understood and worked out in everyone's mind and attitude before true equality can be attained. These are matters such as, acknowledging that men may take part in child

rearing and doing household chores and women can and may drive boats, fix engines, survey lands and become presidents - in an equal manner. These are the challenges for our education system, the faith community and human resources training and development activities.

The opportunities for Palau are laid out in the National Master Development Plan and the National Population Policy Recommendations. The Master Plan has been adopted and is being implemented. The Population Policy needs to be adopted and its implemented needs to be well integrated into the implementation activities of the Master Plan. These opportunities can be taken advantages of by the National Committee on Population and Children, working in collaborative efforts with the various ministries and NGOs to monitor the progress of activities.

111 .**Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Health Care**

- ✓ The government has for a very long time reaffirmed the **reproductive** rights of the individual - the right to decide freely the number and spacing of children, the right to full range of reproductive health services. In fact, this government policy has come under attack by some who think that this policy has led to a very **slow rate of population growth** resulting in the need to import foreign labor for our development requirements. With respect to reproductive health services the law prohibits discrimination. Rapes and other sexual violence against both women and men are offenses punishable by law **equally**.

- ✓ Reproductive health care services and family planning are physically accessible and made available to all who reside

in Palau. About 99% of births in Palau occur in the hospital. A weakness in the existing reproductive health programme is in the treatment of infertility, although, this in itself is a relatively minor issue.

- ✓ Reproductive health-care services are already an integral part of our primary health care system.

The constraints faced by the government continue to revolve around the problems of. a) personnel who have limited expertise in the subject of reproductive health; b) community's reluctance to talk about issues relating to reproductive health, c) biases about sexual practices both in the part of providers of care and communities and d) **financial** resources to research and/or develop more innovative activities to improve reproductive health status.

IV Strengthening the Partnership with Civil Society

- ✓ Our government is small and almost any planning activity would involve the government, members of the national congress, traditional leaders and most of the community organizations, including and especially women's groups.

- ✓ The government nominates NGO representatives to membership in various planning and management committees, commissions. It also encourages nominations of NGO members to attend conferences and workshops, especially those dealing with population issues. The National Committee on Population and Children has held many conferences and workshops with various community groups on population issues.

Emerging opportunities have to do with more and more organizations being formed that are led by women. The Rotary Club of Palau has been led mainly by women. Other very active groups in the society are led by women. The most vocal member of the senate of the National Congress is the lady senator who chairs the health committee. These are opportunities that can be harnessed towards implementation of the ICPD goals and objectives.

/There are no real constraints for nongovernmental organizations in their efforts to participate in policy dialogue and/or programme implementation at the national level. Avenues exist for them through other community groups, the faith community, or even through their state governments.

✓ The major progress made in partnership building is the leadership already exerted by many women leaders in the community. Many women have already shown lots of strength, commitment and dedication to population issues ranging from prostitution to breast and cervical cancer to women's role in business and politics. In the future, women perhaps may not need to be empowered by either men or the community **but to bind themselves together and move forward together,**

✓ Honorable Chairman, the Palau delegation wishes to express its appreciations to UNFPA for inviting the Republic of Palau to participate in this very important conference. We wish to express our appreciation also to the Government of the Netherlands for hosting this important Hague Forum.

I thank you.