

As written



STATEMENT

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HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH**

**AT
THE HAGUE INTERNATIONAL FORUM
ON
ICPD + 5**

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Mr. President
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates

May I join, Mr. President, the other delegations, in extending to you our warm congratulations on your election as President of the Hague Forum. Given your outstanding contribution to the Cairo process, we are confident that you will accomplish your task with distinction.

I would also like to express my delegation's sincere thanks and gratitude to the organisers of the Hague Forum as well as to the Government of the Netherlands for hosting and organising this conference so efficiently.

Mr. President,

Bangladesh won independence in 1971 through a War of Liberation under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The Father of the Nation with his infinite wisdom declared for the first time that population explosion was the number one problem of the country, and issued directives to address the problem in the first Five Year Plan in 1973.

The Bangladesh Population Programme long before the Cairo Conference was pursuing development goals through assertive maternal and child health-based family planning programme, and has made remarkable progress over the last twenty seven years. As a result, both the demographic and epidemiological transitions are already underway. Our success is attributable to many factors which include Government's sustained political commitment; maternal and child health-based strategy; extensive network of field workers and clinics; committed field force with women-to-women services; well-knit community-based distribution approach; cafeteria approach to services; active government-NGO collaboration; support of civil society; advocacy with religious and other community leaders; proactive role of the mass media; intersectoral collaboration; wide use of research in policy making; women's empowerment and modernization effects of education in particular education of girls, microcredit and income generation activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ICPD has given us a new paradigm of development - Human Development, which enhances quality of life through poverty eradication, universal access to education,

ensuring equity, equality and empowerment of women, and universal access to high quality reproductive health services. In order to translate this new development paradigm into action, our government - as the very first step, soon after the Cairo Conference - constituted a broad-based 'National Committee' for the implementation of the Programme of Action. Subsequently, a comprehensive "National Plan of Action" was developed.

During the last four years, a number of initiatives have been undertaken for bringing about necessary changes at the level of policies, strategies and programmes. Under the enlightened leadership and personal commitment of our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, we have gained considerable progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

Our National Plan of Action in accordance with the commitment we made at the ICPD has included large number of programmes covering each of the themes related to **poverty eradication, women's equity, equality and empowerment and reproductive rights and reproductive health.**

Mr. President,

The **gender agenda** in particular is a top priority in Bangladesh. We are fully committed to pursuing this agenda. For the first time we have adopted a **National Women Development Policy**. I am also happy to report to this Forum that currently we are implementing one of the largest secondary school stipend programmes for girls in South Asia. Women's participation in the political process is encouraging, particularly in the local government system where one-third of seats are reserved for women. About 10 million women are beneficiaries of microcredit. Practical measures are in force to eliminate violence against women. Women's quota in public administration and public sector employment has been introduced with 60% women's quota for primary school teachers.

Last July, the **Health and Population Sector Strategy (HPSS)** introduced one-stop full-range essential reproductive health, family planning and child health services through the integrated service delivery mechanism. Last year, Government also launched **Health and Population Sector Programme (HPSP)**, which operationalizes the Strategy with special emphasis on client-centred and needs-based services; sector-wide management; vulnerable women and children; maternal and infant mortality; baby-friendly and woman-friendly hospital initiatives; and fertility reduction through various social and economic measures.

As it is well recognised, Bangladesh is in the vanguard of an excellent **government-civil society** collaboration. In order to strengthen this effort, a Government-NGO Consultative Council (GNCC) has been constituted in 1996.

In promoting the objectives of Cairo, we are proud to have the headquarters in Dhaka of the innovative organisation: Partners in Population and Development (PPD) which has created a south-south centre to promote inter-country sharing of best practices.

Distinguished Delegates,

As we move ahead in the ICPD implementation, we are fully conscious of the challenges which lie ahead. We sincerely believe that the ongoing process of reorganization and restructuring now being implemented under the new Programme will be critical to the future success of our reproductive health strategy. Declining external assistance for human development sector and the recent worst-ever floods in Bangladesh will, I am afraid, have a slowing down effect on future implementation.

Mr. President,

Let me emphasize, in conclusion, that globally, if there is a sluggish progress toward the goals of ICPD, the single biggest obstacle is the lack of availability of committed level of resources. The Least Developed Countries are in a particularly difficult situation. Many developing countries have demonstrated **sufficient** political will, societal mobilization and increased resource commitment in the social sector. However, diminishing international support has forced countries even with highly successful programmes to scale down their pace of implementation.

Mr. President,

We hope this review at The Hague Forum and its subsequent Prep Com and the General Assembly Special Session will invigorate us to live up to our commitments made both at the national and international levels. Only then the outcome of Cairo will become truly a global action agenda - transforming the choice and opportunities for women, men and young people everywhere for a better life.

I thank you, **Mr. President.**
