



FIJI

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Republic of the Fiji Islands

**Statement by His Excellency
Hon. Dr. Isimeli Jale Cokanasiga
Minister for Health**

to the

Twenty-first Special Session of the General Assembly

on

**The Review and Appraisal
of the
Implementation of the Program of Action
of the
International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD + 5)**

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Mr. President,

I would like to congratulate you on your election and join other distinguished delegates in thanking you for your very able leadership in conducting the business of this august body.

Mr. President,

My delegation wishes to associate itself with the position of the Group of 77 and China and reaffirm our government's commitment in addressing population policies as an integral part of development and in working towards attaining the targets set by the Cairo Programme of Action.

The progress made towards achieving the goals of ICPD can be gauged from two broad indicators: life expectancy and infant mortality. Our life expectancy currently stands at 69 years and is expected to reach 75 years in 2015. Our infant mortality presently stands at 20 per thousand live births. Improvements in life expectancy and infant mortality imply a greater demand on government services for the elderly.

Another factor contributing to the achievement of ICPD goals is improved educational level. For example, primary school age enrollment is almost 100%, while approximately 70% of the relevant age group are enrolled in secondary schools.

Our country has a well-educated workforce and while we produce a growing number of skilled workers, we have been losing a lot of these workers through outward migration and people seeking employment in developed countries such as Australia, New Zealand and, more recently, the United Kingdom and the United States.

National Policies and Programme

In recognizing the important relationship between population and development, my government has set forth two broad national goals in relation to population activities. The first is to ensure that population growth is compatible with sustained improvement in our standard of living. This is reflected in our health policies and the improving health status of our people.

The second goal is to equip the population with a range of skills to meet the demand of an expanding economy. Towards this end, my government in collaboration with the International Labor Organization (ILO) finalized the Integrated Human Resource Development (HRD) Programme for Employment Promotion. The programme includes training in critical areas such as the hotel and tourism industries including ecotourism, agriculture and fisheries and improving entrepreneurial skills for micro-enterprise development to enhance productivity and economic growth.

Whilst it is noteworthy that the various training provide skilled personnel for the country's workforce, the constraint, however, is the loss of trained and skilled people through emigration. Internal migration, too, has resulted in creating increased pressure on housing, public utilities and other services as well as the illegal occupation of land in the urban centres.

Mr. President,

For developing countries like ours, the most pressing issue is addressing the needs of people living below the poverty line which is compounded by the level of unemployment generally encompassing younger population. There is, therefore, an imbalance between the high unemployment causing poverty and the inability of the economy to generate additional jobs to accommodate those unemployed in the medium to long-term. This unfortunate situation has implications on crime, poverty and associated social problems.

My government has initiated programmes in the informal and agricultural sectors as alternatives for self-employment for those who do not succeed in finding formal sector employment. This has been undertaken through the development of such schemes as micro-credit financing and small businesses under the responsibility and supervision of the appropriate government ministries and local financial institutions.

Mr. President,

The national five-year strategic human resource plan, with its sub-components and targeted for completion in 1999, will strengthen our

information system. This system will enhance the capacity to collect and disseminate data and has the ability to forecast trends in the supply and demand for human resources. This effort complements the Integrated Programme for Employment Promotion and Career Counseling being done in schools.

Gender Equality, Equity and the Empowerment of Women

Mr. President,

In regard to gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women, my government not only recognizes, but is also sensitive to the rights of women as enshrined in our country's Constitution. We have also ratified international instruments such as the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995 and the ICPD POA in 1994 which identified gender equality, equity and empowerment of women including the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action.

Reproductive Health Care and Reproductive Health Rights

Mr. President,

We support the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of reproductive health and sexual health referring to the right of women and men to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of "fertility regulation". We also endorse the words of the Cairo Programme of Action stating "the focus must be on the right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information for taking such a decision."

In working towards this goal, my government has produced a comprehensive policy guideline on reproductive health in our National Health Plan for 1998 to 2002 and to integrate the programme into our primary health care services.

Mr. President,

For family planning and safe sex, contraceptives are available free of charge and distributed without coercion through government health institutions. Increasing the choice of methods available in family planning is another activity undertaken by the government following ICPD. Sub-dermal contraceptive implants were introduced as a controlled pilot programme and became available nationwide in 1997.

For the male method of contraception, vasectomy has been actively promoted in the past five years. However, the rate of its acceptance is still comparatively low. Another milestone in this area has been the approval of the Nurses and Midwives Board to train nurses to provide services for intrauterine contraceptive device (IUCD). This has further enhanced the universal application of and access to a full range of safe and reliable family planning methods.

Mr. President,

My government is fully aware of the need and the importance of making health care services available to everyone. In addressing this issue, a new cadre of workers (volunteers) called the Community Based Distributors (CBD) of family planning contraceptives was created through an inter-agency collaboration between UNFPA, the Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji and the Ministry of Health.

Women and Children

Mr. President,

The nutritional status of women and children in Fiji remain a concern for the government where a high percentage of women and children were found to be anaemic, especially women during pregnancy. In contrast, a low percentage of male over 15 years were noted to be anaemic. Correcting our chronic status of anaemia will be an activity worth achieving in addressing maternal morbidity as outlined in the ICPD-POA.

Mr. President,

Abortion is illegal in Fiji but induced abortion is permissible only on medical grounds if the pregnancy were to threaten the life of the mother or the unborn. Prevention of unwanted pregnancy is also given priority through sexual health education and expanded family planning services. It must be noted that much of our reproductive health programmes is donor-funded and dependent upon the goodwill of the international community.

Reproductive Health and Contraception

Education and awareness programmes on reproductive health and contraception amongst adolescents is actively promoted to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Our Ministry of Education has introduced family life education in the curriculum to promote awareness among children in the upper primary and secondary schools; sensitizing them about their body, sexual health matters and the importance of chastity and morality on sexual behavior as valued by the diverse culture of our people.

Strengthening Partnerships with Civil Societies

Mr. President,

Since Cairo, the government has strengthened collaboration and partnerships with civil societies in the area of reproductive health. It is cognizant of the fact that certain activities can be undertaken more effectively with the involvement of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) particularly in the outreach programme to eliminate prostitution, STDs and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Conclusion

Mr. President,

In November 1998, Ministers of Health from Pacific Island Countries met in Fiji to discuss our successes and achievements and our collective response to the Cairo objectives. Fiji is grateful to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United

Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and all our development partners in assisting and facilitating our efforts towards achieving our goals.

Whilst we re-commit ourselves to the Cairo Programme of Action and its review processes, my government strongly calls for the support of the international community in realizing its goals. Achieving the multiplicity of goals of various conferences such as the Agenda 21; Barbados Programme of Action for Small Island States; and the Cairo Programme of Action is not easy, but we can fully realize it if the international community, international financial institutions, private sector, NGOs and the national governments together make a firm and collaborative commitment to such a worthy undertaking. The noble task ahead of us all is to make the world a better place for everyone to live in.

May God bless you all. Thank you, Mr. President. Vinaka vakalevu.
