

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR ABDULLAH TARMUGI  
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE  
AT THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION FOR  
THE OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF  
THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
NEW YORK, 2 JULY 1999**

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to participate in this Special Session of the General Assembly. The Government of Singapore attaches great importance to the consensus reached in Cairo in 1994 and to the ICPD review process. We hope that this consultative process will achieve new insights and consensus on the nexus between population and development.

**Population and Sustainable Development**

2           Five years ago in Cairo, 179 countries adopted the ICPD Programme of Action which underscores the integral linkages between population and development. To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all peoples, the Programme of Action states that Governments should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production as well as consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies. I am here today to share with you Singapore's development experiences, and to show our support for this global enterprise.

Mr President,

3           When Singapore gained independence in 1965, our unemployment rate was about 10%, and our future, uncertain. Singapore's per capita GNP was low, the literacy rate was low, infant mortality rate was high, and a large proportion of the population was without proper housing. The situation was exacerbated by high population growth, which exerted tremendous pressures on the physical and social infrastructure.

4 The government then decided to moderate our population growth as part of our development strategy. Appropriate population policies were launched and the Singapore Family Planning and Population Board was established in 1966 to spearhead family planning activities. Fertility decline was rapid, and replacement fertility was soon reached in 1975.

5 The total fertility rate then continued to decline and reached 1.4 in 1986. However, such a low level of fertility would eventually result in negative population growth, leading to severe labor shortage and unsustainable development. With no sign of an upturn in fertility, Singapore decided in 1987 to encourage marriage and childbearing.

6 Our current population policy is pro-family, providing strong support to working mothers. Singapore endorses the ICPD initiative encouraging states to have women-specific programmes to meet the special biological and social challenges faced by women. We recognise the difficulties working women face in balancing their multiple roles as workers, mothers, and wives. To assist them, we have introduced generous tax incentives for working mothers, employers are encouraged to grant special leave for working mothers whose children have fallen sick, and subsidized childcare is widely available. With the increasing female labor participation rate now exceeding 51%, these measures had been effective in helping working mothers to realise their desired family size, and to balance their multiple roles.

### **Reproductive Health Services**

7 The Singapore Family Planning and Population Board provided comprehensive family planning services to the public. The programme focussed on the provision of contraceptives within the reach and financial means of everyone.

8 Family health services soon extended beyond family planning services, and, today, a full range of reproductive and primary health services are offered today. The government's family reproductive services are administered through a network of polyclinics located in main townships throughout the country. These polyclinics provide easily accessible and affordable family planning services, antenatal and post natal care and well women screening as part of a comprehensive system of primary health care. In addition, private general practitioners and obstetricians and gynaecologists provide family and primary health services to the public.

Mr President,

9 The ICPD initiatives set out a number of time-bound population and development goals for a 20-year period. These include the provision of universal access to reproductive health services, family planning and sexual health; and a reduction in infant, child and maternal mortality.

10 The improvements in Singapore's reproductive health services over the years have brought tangible results. Maternal mortality has fallen from 4 per 10,000 births in 1965 to 1 per 10,000 births in 1998. Infant mortality fell from 26 per 1,000 births in 1965 to 4 per 1,000 births in 1998. In addition, all adolescents receive education on reproductive health as part of the school curriculum.

### **Human Resource Development and Foreign Talents**

Mr President,

11 We agree with the ICPD that high priority should be given to investments in education and training. We should pay special attention to the young, and invest in the development and implementation of national plans which enable them to meet their aspirations.

12 Singapore already has a comprehensive education system that is accorded high priority in the allocation of national resources. In 1981, only 45% of the cohort of pupils who entered school ten years earlier completed their secondary school education<sup>1</sup>. Today, 74% of the cohort do so. We have also seen improvements in the proportion of entrants into tertiary education. Last year, 21% of the cohort went to university, compared with only 5% in 1980. Our aim is to ensure that all Singaporeans have access to the educational and training opportunities needed to realise their individual potential. We will continue to review, evolve and enhance Singapore's education system to facilitate a culture of lifelong learning and to promote employability.

13 Beyond our commitment to develop every Singaporean to his full potential, we will at the same time seek to attract talent and expertise from abroad. We firmly believe that the successful nations of the future must be able to harness the global flows of people and ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> Having completed secondary education is defined here as passing three GCE "O" level subjects.

## **Ageing of the Population**

Mr President,

14 As we look ahead to future challenges, one major issue that will confront Singapore, is the greying of the population. Singapore will experience a rapid increase in both the number and proportion of older persons aged 65 and above. This will rise from 7% in 1998, to 19% of our population in 2030. At the same time, the number and proportion of younger, working people will fall due to our declining fertility. These trends will bring complex and profound challenges that will affect individuals, families, communities as well as development at the national level. Singapore therefore applauds the ICPD goal to further research and develop comprehensive strategies to meet the challenges of population ageing.

15 Singapore's approach has been to anticipate these challenges and to prepare early for an ageing population. Our goal is to enable older people to live active, healthy and secure lives as integral and valuable members of the community. We will achieve this through our philosophy of collective responsibility. This starts with individual responsibility to plan and prepare early for old age. It sees the family as the primary pillar of care for the elderly with the community providing a comprehensive range of services to support the elderly and to enable the family to play its care-giving role. The role of government is to provide leadership, as well as the policy framework, infrastructure, resources and funding to enable all levels of society to play their part.

Mr President,

16 We recognise that the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population are complex and cannot be met by the government acting alone. We have therefore adopted a multi-sectoral approach. The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Health Care for the Elderly was formed in 1997 to review and identify measures to ensure their health care needs will continue to be met, and remains affordable. The Committee's recommendations are being implemented. Last year, another Inter-Ministerial Committee, comprising high level representatives from the public and private sectors and civil society has been set up to study the issues in relation to the elderly and to ensure a coordinated national approach to prepare for the ageing of Singapore. The issues being studied include employment and employability; financial security; housing and land-use policies; social integration and services including healthcare; as well as cohesion and conflict in an ageing society. We believe that this is an area where we can learn from other countries and, in time, share expertise.

### **International Cooperation**

Mr President,

17 We support the implementation of the ICPD initiatives as a collaborative effort where all countries work together to attain ICPD goals and objectives.

Through the years, Singapore has emphasized the provision of technical training to other developing countries in the region. We conduct many courses in the fields of health, children and family services. Since 1995, we have sponsored more than a hundred participants from countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, and Thailand in these areas alone. Special sponsorship schemes have been implemented under the Singapore Cooperation Programme. We will continue to do more in this area.

## **Conclusion**

Mr President,

18           Negotiations on the text that we are adopting today on the further implementation of ICPD have been challenging. My delegation would like to place on record our appreciation for the hard work done by the Preparatory Committee and by all negotiating partners in reaching this new consensus.

19           The Cairo Plan of Action and the document we are about to adopt serve as guides on population issues for our respective governments in our efforts to achieve sustained economic growth and sustainable development. The new document from this meeting will serve as an additional guide in our respective national efforts, where relevant. It should complement our efforts to meet the original objectives of Cairo. The political will of national governments and of all partners in development, and meaningful cooperation between civic society and governments, remain the primary ingredients for the success of ICPD implementation. We have a shared responsibility and a mutual interest in achieving the goals we set in Cairo. It is in this spirit that my government renews our commitment to the ICPD process and calls on all our partners in the international community to do the same.

20           I thank you, Mr President, for the opportunity to address this Special Session.

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