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Statement by

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for Health and Family Welfare
of the Republic of India**

**at the Twenty-first Special Session
of the General Assembly**

**on Overall Review and Appraisal of the
Implementation of the Programme
of Action of the International
Conference on Population
and Development**

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Mr. President,

India is pleased to participate in this Special Session of the General Assembly on ICPD + 5. The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo was an important landmark, requiring specific commitments and concerted actions in a true spirit of partnership, over the next twenty years, in order to fully meet our shared objectives. The outcomes of the ICPD advanced the cause of universal access to health and well being. We are happy that the international community has gathered to review the implementation of this Programme, to identify obstacles and to jointly identify key future actions, which will certainly assist in early achievement of our ambitious goals.

2. The Programme of Action of ICPD built upon earlier agreements reached at the World Summit for Children (1990) and the World Conference on Human Rights (1993). In turn, this Programme of Action had a profound influence on the deliberations at the World Summit on Social Development (1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). It places the individual at the centre of all developmental activities and women and children at the centre of population policy. It rests on the pillars of human rights, and gender equity and equality. It places due emphasis on active cooperation with Non-Governmental organizations in meeting these goals. It marks a major shift in our focus from family planning to reproductive health, to be addressed of course, within the social, cultural and economic contexts of each country.

3. It stresses the importance of sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development, acknowledging the responsibility of the developed countries in the international pursuit of sustainable development and continued efforts to promote sustained economic growth and to narrow imbalances in a manner that can benefit all countries, specially the developing countries. Concerted efforts are required to ensure that the international economic environment is favourable and supportive of the efforts of developing countries in this regard. After all the macro-economic policies of a country do not function in a vacuum but are informed and greatly influenced by the prevailing international scenario. Similarly, we believe that there is an urgent need for the developing countries, with the assistance of the international community, to develop and implement programmes to guarantee a minimum level of consumption for their citizens, specially the poor and the disadvantaged.

4. India participated actively and constructively, along with all other delegations, in the meetings of the Preparatory Committee and would like to record its appreciation for the hard work and dedication of its Chairman, Ambassador **Anwarul Karim Chowdhury** of Bangladesh. The deliberations in the Prepcom were long and contested, indicative clearly of the high importance attached by all countries to this issue.

5. India also availed of this opportunity to review in depth its own achievements of the ICPD goals. We have been steadily broadening the scope of the National Family Planning programme, initiated way back in 1951. Since its inception, the programme has been fully voluntary and the main efforts of the Government have been directed towards provision of services and encouraging citizens to avail of them, through information, education and communication. The guiding objective of our programme has been to stabilise the population at a level consistent with the needs of national development. In keeping with the democratic ethos, the individual's freedom

for decision-making is a hallmark of all our initiatives in this field.

6. Let me chronicle the evolution of our programme. During the seventies, our programme was renamed as the Family Welfare programme, to emphasise that it is not merely a birth control programme. In the eighties, the inclusion of initiatives such as the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) and the Safe Motherhood Programme (CSSM) further widened the outreach of our efforts. The close linkages between the health of the mother and young children saw the programme coalesce into the Maternal and Child Health Programme (MCH). Then came the ICPD at Cairo, and the evolution of a holistic approach to child survival, maternal health and contraception issues. India responded by developing and implementing the present Reproductive and Child Health programme (RCH), formally inaugurated in 1997.

7. We have made a sincere and significant effort in moving towards the ICPD goals. Programmes have been reorganised into a comprehensive reproductive and child health package, which not only emphasises the holistic approach to reproductive health needs, but also puts quality of service and user satisfaction at the top of our agenda. We have, therefore, instituted an objective monitoring system, through professional agencies, to ascertain the extent to which these services are actually reaching our citizens. Feedback **from** the field clearly demonstrates that change is detectable in the work of service providers. We have a highly developed indigenous system of medicine which has also been effectively harnessed to participate in these endeavours.

8. Post-Cairo, India is making steady progress towards achieving reproductive health and child health goals. Based on a public health approach, the RCH programme aims at maximum coverage and promotes equity by improving accessibility and providing choices, especially for women, adolescents, socio-economically backward groups, **tribals** and slum dwellers. Our reproductive and child health programme aims to be participatory by involving all stakeholders, supporting **decentralisation** and area-specific planning.

9. One of the important landmarks in the history of Family Welfare Programme in India was the bold and important policy decision to withdraw the system of monitoring family welfare programmes with method specific target system. This Target Free Approach was later replaced by a Community Need Based approach; this major shift in the programme has led to a focus on **decentralised**, need based, participatory planning and a monitoring system with emphasis on quality of care and delivery of essential reproductive health services. This approach has been fully reflected in the ongoing RCH Programme, being implemented nation wide.

10. The objectives of universal primary education, gender equality, women's empowerment and generation of employment opportunities are being pursued in a meaningful manner. As a measure of equity, we are making all efforts to reach out to the underserved in urban slums and tribal areas.

11. We have initiated concerted efforts in one of the most important areas of the POA, namely, advocating for the protection of the girl child. The Parliament has also enacted legislation to ban sex determination of the foetus. Noteworthy enhancement has been achieved in women's education and participation in the work force, thereby increasing their role as economic partners. Over the years India has witnessed a shift in the approach from women's welfare to women's

development to women's empowerment, with clear results. During the current five year plan, we are making further efforts towards empowerment of women, through the creation of an enabling environment, designed with the full participation of women's representatives and supported by requisite policies and programmes, as well as legislative support. It is a matter of satisfaction that women's participation in higher levels of employment and in professional education has been increasing.

12. The pattern of population growth and structure clearly outlines the need to focus on the needs of adolescents as well as the ageing population. In order to effectively meet the changing needs of our youth, a policy that concentrates on youth empowerment and gender justice has been developed. Objectives of this policy include increased access by young people to all information and services, including, and I stress, reproductive health, and drug abuse, while at the same time promoting opportunities for continuing education, skill development and employment. We are aware of the growing menace of HIV/AIDS and we have initiated a large programme of public education, **counselling** and preventive measures, which we trust will help us counter this serious problem.

13. Due recognition is being accorded to the needs of the increasing proportion of aged in our country and a Policy for the Aged has also been developed recently, covering major thrust areas like economic support and shelter, health, as well as the productive role of the aged in developmental activities.

14. We have been happy with the increasing involvement of the non-governmental organizations with policy formulation, implementation of programmes and their monitoring. Large parts of India are now served by a network of **NGOs**. The strong points of these organizations are their flexible procedures, innovative approach and rapport with the local population.

15. We strongly believe that in a truly globalised world, the desire of **free** movement of **labour** as a factor of production, must be truly enhanced. Governments should therefore review legislations that result in inordinate and excessive Government control in this area, even when all other areas are being significantly liberalised and deregulated.

16. While reviewing the efforts made in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, we need to ensure the maintenance of its holistic approach. It is undesirable to implement it in a fragmented or segregated manner in different international bodies. Furthermore, the provision of additional resources is essential to meet these goals, through strengthening of delivery and other attendant systems. While we in India have largely met our resource commitments, by enhancing current outlays, several countries have found it much more difficult to make such resources available. India therefore urges all partners, specially donor countries and UN agencies, to assist the developing countries in need, with their efforts to achieve the implementation of ICPD Programme of Action.

17. We are happy that the Special Session has resulted in an identification of ways to move forward, even more meaningfully, in all these areas in an integrated and comprehensive manner.

Thank you, Mr. President.