



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE  
MARSHALL ISLANDS TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**Statement by His Excellency Ambassador Jackeo A. Relang  
Chairman of the Delegation of the Republic of the Marshall Islands**

**21st special session of the United Nations General Assembly for an overall review and  
appraisal of the Plan of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development  
2 July 1999**

Excellencies, Honorable ministers, Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,  
It is my honor to bring you greetings and *Iakwe* from the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, His Excellency The Honorable Imata Kabua.

Mr. President, my Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, His Excellency The Honorable Phillip Muller, could not avail himself to lead the Marshall Islands delegation due to pressing and urgent commitments at home. I take this opportunity to convey his sincere apologies, and that he has expressed his wish for a successful outcome to this special session. The Marshall Islands Government pledges its support and commitment to the implementation of the ICPD+5 recommendations and the Plan of Action.

Prior to the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt, in September 1994, the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands was greatly concerned about its rapidly growing population and the health, social, and economic consequences associated with a rapidly growing population, especially to a small island developing state.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands was one of the 179 countries that fully supported and approved the ICPD plan of action in Cairo, and has continued to strongly support the goals and objectives of the ICPD programme of action. We are committed to its implementation at the national level, even though our resources are scarce.

One of the best examples of the Marshall Islands Government's strong support and commitment to the ICPD plan of action is the establishment of the National Population Council in 1994, with members from the various ministries and agencies of the government, as well as representatives from religious, NGO's, and local groups. This Council was tasked with the responsibility to formulate and implement a National Population and Development Policy. In response the Council has begun to address the issues associated with a rapidly growing population and the health, social, environmental and economic ramifications associated with a rapidly growing population.

As a result of the work of the Council, a National Population and Development Policy was adopted in 1995. One of the issues addressed in the policy is primary health care. A cornerstone in our primary care services is individual and community involvement in health care service delivery including public health, maternal reproductive health, family planning & sexual health. Community Health Councils have been established promoting health and creating outreach activities aimed at and encouraging community participation and ownership.

In 1997 the Marshall Islands government drafted a Five Year Population and Development Action Plan to further strengthen and implement the Population and Development Policy and incorporate the population strategies into the developmental planning process to achieve sustainable economic and social development. Long-term objectives include reducing the rate of population growth to a level compatible with the country's resource base and potential, to improve the societal status of women, and to lower the fertility, morbidity, and mortality rates. Short term objectives include improving the quality of education, increase environmental awareness, improve nutritional awareness and behavioral changes in relation to diet and life styles, reduce teen pregnancies, creating greater awareness of population-related issues, improving access to family planning services, and upgrading the skills of the labor force, and increasing women's participation in the labor force.

The main issues affecting women in the RMI include the comparatively low participation of women in paid employment, high attrition among school age girls, teen pregnancies, high rate of malnutrition, anemia, and iron deficiency among women. The government established the office of women's affairs and tasked it with coordinating all government activities concerning women and development.

Cultural barriers and taboos have prevented women from seeking reproductive and sexual health and family planning services due to the availability of only male health care providers. Recognizing this limitation, the government has recently completed its first training of female health assistants whereby reducing the barriers for women to receive much needed health care services.

Adolescents and young adults make up a large segment of the population in the Marshall islands and require special health prevention needs and education. The Government has established a National Youth Council with overall responsibility. Assisting this Council is a non-profit, community-based organization, Youth to Youth in Health, which in partnership with the Health Services Division of the Ministry of Health and Environment have successfully been providing reproductive health and clinic services and youth peer education for the past several years to both urban and rural populations throughout the Marshall islands. Youth to Youth in Health have encouraged hundreds of young people to become role models providing hope to youth at high risk for such things as teen pregnancy, suicide, substance abuse, STD/AIDS, emphasizing health awareness, leadership skills and cultural appreciation through music and drama. Currently this NGO is interested in seeking support for an enhanced project for youth health services. Details are available through the Marshall Islands Permanent Mission.

As I have mentioned, the Marshall Islands are fully aware of the linkages between the major international agreements reached since the Rio conference. The linkages are there at the international level, but we can also clearly see the connections at the national level. We have sought to make the implementation of the population policies compatible with other sustainable development efforts. As part of the process of listening to the people and seeking to address their needs, the government has decided to hold another national economic and social summit. The summit will draw together all interested citizens and government officials. Our intention is to further build on a national consensus for sustainable development and to seek views on what sort of projects could be implemented in the Marshall Islands, with private sector and NGO involvement. We are seeking from the summit an endorsement of the revitalized national commission on sustainable development which would have broad participation. This would assist us in taking on board the priorities from the Barbados Program of Action, the Copenhagen Plan of Action, the ICPD Plan of Action, as well as other international issues, and to incorporate these into the individual Ministries and agencies work plans. We will seek to bring all these activities together under the auspices of a national centrally coordinated body, with the full involvement of the communities in the Marshall Islands. This clearly show how we intend to move forward in our future efforts, and that we are serious about seeking to complement social and economic policy with sustainable development initiatives. A concrete proposal which we are currently pursuing is the idea that the outer island health centers should have solar power electricity. This would give us savings in fuel oil, and would be a much more sustainable basis for assisting us in maintaining these efforts. Clearly, international support will be needed, and we count on the interested donor governments to bear our concerns in mind.

The RMI Government initiatives aimed at implementing national population and development goals have been numerous. However, there remains many challenges. The need to strengthen the capacities of human resources and implement new programs are only limited by resource availability. Currently, international organizations like UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO, are the major funding sources for implementing population programs and projects. Others, like UNESCO, could do much more in the Pacific Island Countries. Reduced budget allocations have required the Marshall Islands Government to seek additional assistance from bilateral and multilateral sources. But these sources are also on the decline, particularly for the Small Island Developing States like the Marshall Islands. In order to try and complement these declining resources, my delegation attaches great importance to promoting international cooperation through a collaboration of resources such as the South-South initiatives. Initiatives at the regional level, such as for the Pacific Island Countries, could be a most beneficial and cost-effective use of scarce funds. The Marshall Islands have taken steps to ensure the successful domestic implementation of the ICPD Plan of Action and will continue to advocate support from national, regional, and international leaders so that the ICPD Plan of Action becomes a successful reality. Thank you Mr. President for this opportunity.