

SAMOA



STATEMENT

by

**H.E HONOURABLE MISA TELEFONI RETZLAFF
MINISTER OF HEALTH**

to the

21st SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

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,

May I congratulate you most warmly on your well-acclaimed election, and express to you, on behalf of my Government, our confidence and support for your Presidency.

Mr. President,

Samoa is an independent sovereign State in the South Pacific and our country is committed to the principle, and the issue **recognised** as crucial in the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (ICPD-POA) Cairo 1994, that it is not the number of people that is the crucial factor, but rather the standard of living of those people. A corollary to this is that the emphasis should not only be on the number of people in any country, but whether the resources of that country are equitably distributed amongst those people. We **recognise** that the best means of achieving such a grandiose objective is to work to ensure free access to education and health by all our people. We are close to achieving that objective.

Samoa is unique in the Pacific region, because our strong culture is central to our way of life, and impacts on our Westminster system of government. Our people's affinity with the land and the sea is based on this love of tradition, and strong Christian principles, which motivate and sustain us both spiritually and physically.

Samoa has, with our partner Pacific island countries, fully embraced the Healthy Islands Concept promoted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in our region. Healthy Islands **recognises** that sustainable development in island states is vastly different from any other entities, and is comparable to Healthy Cities only by nomenclature. We have reinforced our commitment to the Healthy Islands principles by acceding to the treaty obligations in the Rarotonga Agreement (1997) and its predecessor the Yanuca Declaration (1995). We believe that most of the goals and objectives of the ICPD-POA are embodied in these initiatives.

Samoa believes that the main lesson from Cairo (1994 ICPD-POA) and the Hague (ICPD + 5) is that people first development means what it says – Putting People First! Sustainable economic growth must not only focus on the speed of that growth, but the equitable access of the poorest sector to the

growth. We also **recognise** that there can be only so much growth, despite technological advances; the earth and her resources are finite, while human and other life systems' appetites are not. What is needed is the proper management of the important but necessary coexistence between population, resources (to ensure food security), the environment, and development.

Samoa accepts and is promoting all the Cairo principles including eradicating poverty, safe reproductive health, equal access to health services, the promotion of human rights, but most importantly, Samoa believes that the essential ingredient of any successful initiative is the empowerment of women. Samoa is not just a signatory to the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) but it has integrated its principles in the implementation of government and private sector initiatives at all levels.

Samoa's women are better educated – the majority of scholarships are women. While we still need to improve accessing secondary education for women, those women who reach the top are joining Cabinet, heading the largest government departments, and have headed overseas diplomatic missions. We believe that the proof of the pudding is in the eating – we also are the only country in the world that has a National Holiday for women – the Monday after Mother's Day. Our women are asserting their God given right to control their bodies, and are making the decisions concerning the number of children they should bear, in deference to their ability to shelter and school those children, and the reliability of their men folk in helping to provide these.

With a more educated, assertive and politically active female population, the stage is now set for Samoa to **achieve** progress in attaining Cairo's goals. We have 100% access to health services. Reproductive Health/ Family Planning (RH/FP) are integral components of our Primary Health Care System. Our immunisation coverage at 99% is one of the highest in the world. All our maternity hospitals are baby friendly - and generally only women who cannot, do not breast-feed their children. Samoa **recognises** that prevention is the only long-term formula to curtail burgeoning health costs, and health prevention is the key to our National Health Plan. We have declared war on tobacco use, and are targeting Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes and hypertension, as a national priority.

With a significant part of our population (42%) under 15 years of age, a National Youth Policy giving priority to education is in the forefront of government policy planning. We are working in close collaboration with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in partnership strategies to promote good health for all. We are striving to provide the best health services our resources can afford, including an overseas treatment scheme for serious cases, which is accessible to all.

Samoa's HIV/AIDS Council has so far kept incidence minimal, however, we realise that we cannot rest on our laurels, so an aggressive awareness campaign is ongoing. We have reached a workable partnership with our religious clergy on family planning and HIV/AIDS strategies. We embrace their basic principle that sexual intercourse should only take place in wedlock, however we promote the practice of safe sex (use of condoms), when this spiritual goal is unachievable. Such a strategy is not only workable, it is successful. We realised early that to go against the Church's moral premise would result in a negative impact of our campaigns for safer sex. Sexual health and family planning policies need the church's cooperation, if they are to be universally acceptable and successful.

On 24 November 1998, Pacific Island Health Ministers gathered in Fiji to assess our success, and our failures in achieving the Cairo objectives. From this meeting, a comprehensive report was published called "the Pacific Response to ICPD-POA". This document indicates we have all learnt much and achieved a great deal of the stated objectives. Samoa is grateful to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and all our development partners in their assistance to our objective of making our people the primary and main focus of our development initiatives.

It is indeed a privilege and an honour to address you in this august forum, and look forward to sharing our ideas to make this world a better place for all our people, as we await the dawning of a new millennium

We wish you all well and may God bless you all.