



Check against Delivery

**2nd Asian Women Parliamentarians'
and Ministers' Conference**

Women and ICPD at 10

Keynote statement

by

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Madam Chair,

Distinguished Ministers and Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address the 2nd Asian Women Parliamentarians' and Ministers' Conference. I am particularly pleased to be here during the 10th anniversary year of the historic International Conference on Population and Development.

Ten years ago, delegates and commentators around the world hailed the Cairo consensus as the beginning of a new era. And rightly so - the Cairo consensus states that the empowerment of women and gender equality are essential to development. It calls for universal access to education and reproductive health services. And it proclaims that sexual and reproductive health is a basic human right.

At the end of the Cairo Conference, Dr. Nafis Sadik, the Secretary-General of the meeting, and UNFPA's former Executive Director, told participating delegations:

"You have crafted a Programme of Action for the next 20 years, which starts from the reality of the world we live in, and shows us a path to a better reality. The Programme contains highly specific goals and recommendations in the mutually reinforcing areas of infant and maternal mortality, education, and reproductive health and family planning, but its effect will be far wider ranging than that. This Programme of Action has the potential to change the world."

ICPD : TEN YEARS LATER

And she was right. Today, ten years later, we can say that the ICPD Programme of Action has changed the world. It may not have changed the world as much as we would have liked, but since the Cairo Conference, we have collectively made progress in many areas, and we should feel proud of our accomplishments. Today, many countries have incorporated population, gender and reproductive health in their national development plans and policies.

In Nepal, the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) focuses on population stabilization, health sector improvements and promotion of the status of women. Progress is measured by the availability of reproductive health and maternity services provided by trained health workers, the use of family planning services and a decrease in the infant and maternal mortality rates. Priority programmes include safe motherhood services, reproductive health care

for teenagers, and programmes to limit the spread of AIDS. The plan cites the importance of gender mainstreaming, gender equality and women's empowerment as means of advancing development. Strategies cited are reform of discriminatory laws, inclusion of women in poverty reduction programmes and increasing gender awareness.

These provisions sound like they came straight from the ICPD Programme of Action!

Since the Cairo Conference, legislatures have been actively translating the commitments of Cairo into action programmes to transform the lives of their people, especially women. Developing countries all over the world have moved to create an enabling environment to implement the Programme of Action. Laws have been passed to ensure gender equality and punish the perpetrators of gender-based violence and trafficking in women and children.

In Bangladesh, the Government in 2002 adopted a national plan of action to combat the sexual abuse and exploitation, including trafficking, of children. This national plan includes such prevention objectives as educational measures on human rights and life skills; increasing economic alternatives for families; instituting legal reform; and eliminating child marriage. Similar action has been taken in the Philippines, where the Government in 2003 adopted laws against trafficking in persons and the exploitation of children.

Since Cairo, police and judges have been trained to respect women's rights. In one of the UN's youngest member States, Timor-Leste, 40% of all reported cases to the police concern domestic violence. UNFPA and other partners have worked to include the issue of domestic violence in the curriculum of the Police Academy and provide training to all officers.

Since Cairo, family planning programmes have been expanded to meet the needs of individuals. In many villages and cities, women are now moving forward with greater confidence and autonomy through better health, income-earning opportunities and legal rights. And men are joining in partnership for healthier and more equitable families and communities.

The ICPD also focused attention on the rights of migrants, refugees and displaced persons, especially women and children, who are often the most marginalized population groups. And it drew attention to two generations that are often forgotten -- adolescents and the ageing, not only in terms of their demographic significance, but also in terms of their roles and needs.

There has been strong support for the ICPD Programme of Action from all quarters, reaching across the political spectrum and across countries and communities and diverse cultures and religions. This support proves that the long and sometimes arduous negotiations that led to Cairo are bearing fruit, and I am confident that this conference will be another step forward.

Such a commitment would not have been complete and advances would not have been achieved without a true and real partnership between government officials and ministries and other actors—namely parliamentarians, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), UN agencies and community and religious leaders.

In Cambodia, UNFPA is working with Buddhist monks to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS through information campaigns inside and outside of monasteries. Monks are reaching out to young people when performing rituals and sermons to eliminate the stigma associated with AIDS. They preach the teachings of Buddha, emphasizing compassion and easing of the burdens of those affected by the epidemic.

ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT

Around the world, we look to the scales of justice, hanging in balance, as a symbol of harmony. This is the very harmony that the Cairo Conference sought to establish. The Programme of Action is designed to create greater balance within the world and within families, communities and nations. It is designed to create greater balance between a nation's population and its resources. It is designed to create greater balance between rich and poor, and between men and women. Overall, it is designed to tip the scales in favour of people and the environment, and in favour of human rights, including the rights of women and girls.

It is only by addressing the issues of population, women's rights and women's health, that we will be able to achieve international development goals, especially the Millennium Development Goals. It is only by addressing these issues that we will achieve greater balance in our world and close some of the dangerous gaps that threaten humanity.

If we look around, we see a world dangerously out of balance:

- 20 per cent of the people in wealthy countries consume 80 per cent of the world's resources;

- Over one billion people in poor countries live in poverty on less than \$1 a day;
- 98 per cent of women and 94 per cent of men with HIV/AIDS live in developing countries;
- Childbirth remains a leading cause of death for women in the developing world, claiming one woman's life every minute.

There is a growing imbalance in global spending by the world's governments. In spite of the increase in wealth during the past 30 years, the percentage of gross domestic product devoted to development assistance has dropped by half--from 0.5 per cent to 0.23 per cent; \$900 billion dollars is spent annually on defense, much of it to fight terrorism; \$300 billion dollars on support for the world's richest farmers; and only \$68 billion dollars is spent on development assistance to reduce poverty and improve human well-being.

I think we can all agree that this equation does not bode well for global peace and security. We need to tip the scales in favour of hope. We need to balance the scales in favour of social justice and development because we cannot have peace and security unless we eradicate poverty.

And to do that, we must invest in population, women and reproductive health, including family planning.

Just one day's worth of the trillion dollars spent on the military each year would fill the funding gap and fulfill the commitment to the Cairo Programme of Action.

Population Effect on Poverty

We now have solid evidence, based on new research, that work towards population goals helps reduce poverty in several ways.

At the national level, slower population growth encourages overall economic growth. Research shows that from 1960 to 1995, about a fifth of economic growth is attributable to reductions in mortality and about a fifth to reductions in fertility.

This demographic shift, from large to smaller families and from high to low death rates, is happening in all countries to varying degrees, and it is partly the result of greater investments in education and health, including reproductive health and family planning.

Benefits of Reproductive Health and Family Planning

Today, women in large numbers in all parts of the world are choosing to have smaller families. This increases women's social and economic opportunities, and it enables parents to invest more in each child, resulting in healthier, better-educated children and more prosperous families.

UNFPA supports reproductive health and family planning in nearly 150 countries. In Pakistan, for instance, UNFPA and other partners are helping to combat high levels of maternal mortality and meet family planning needs by expanding the delivery of reproductive health commodities and services.

The basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of children, and to have the information and means to do so, is the basis of reproductive rights.

Because women are exercising this right, making their own choices and choosing to have fewer children, population growth is slowing. Today, 77 million people are being added to our planet every year, compared to over 81 million a decade ago.

Family planning also has another benefit—it saves lives. A recent study shows that family planning could reduce maternal deaths by 20 per cent, and spacing births by three years or more could reduce infant deaths by half. This is because having babies too close together, or too early or late in life, poses serious health risks. A woman's ability to plan and space her births gives her a better chance of surviving pregnancy and having a healthy baby.

Overall, the story of population is a success and it will continue to be a success if we stay focused and committed to population and reproductive health and if we provide the necessary institutional support and financial resources for these programmes.

Rights-based Approach and Gender

Last year, in preparation for the ten-year review of ICPD, UNFPA conducted a field survey to determine progress in its implementation. Of the 187 countries we contacted, 92 per cent (172 countries) responded.

Here in Asia and the Pacific region, we found that countries are increasingly adopting a rights-based approach to gender issues. All countries in the region reported taking policy, legislative or administrative measures to protect the rights of girls and women.

- 59% of countries ratified UN Conventions, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;
- 57% of countries passed national laws and legislation to protect the rights of girls and women; and
- 36% of countries in the region provide constitutional protection of equality between men and women

All in all, over 90 per cent of Asia/Pacific countries reported measures to promote the empowerment of women. Forty-one per cent of the countries have undertaken efforts to increase the role of women in governance, including elected and appointed officials. I am pleased to see that women parliamentarians are here from most countries in Asia and that women ministers have joined us from a number of countries as well. But I am sad to learn that only 15 percent of all parliamentarians in Asia are women, and the percentage is even lower in the Pacific. Together, we must do more.

According to the global survey, over 95 per cent of countries in this region reported taking measures to address gender disparities in education, and over two-thirds of countries reported measures to enable men to support women's rights and their empowerment. (The report, entitled "Investing in People" can be found on UNFPA website: www.unfpa.org)

THE WAY FORWARD

Over the last decade, the region has achieved significant progress. But widespread poverty and illiteracy, gender discrimination, growing demands in urban areas, environmental degradation and the spread of HIV/AIDS require greater political commitment and financial support than ever before. Unless these issues and the challenges presented by a large youth population and growing numbers of older persons are tackled with leadership and vision, there is danger that the gains achieved so far may well be reversed. Of the 1.2 billion people who live in extreme poverty worldwide on less than \$1 a day, over 60 per cent, or 750 million, live here in Asia, with the majority being women and girls.

Together we must expand our reach to marginalized women. It is still the case that the most public spending reaches those in the urban areas and those who are relatively well off. Poverty reduction strategies are needed to reduce the disparities and inequalities within societies. For the poorest segments of the population, life remains a daily struggle to barely survive. Without access to credit, to social services and to income earning opportunities, there is no way they can climb out of poverty and poor health.

Maternal Mortality and Morbidity

Today far too many women die or become injured or disabled through complications of pregnancy and childbirth. Yet we know there are three things that save women's lives and these are family planning, skilled attendance at birth, and access to emergency obstetric care.

It is now time to scale up efforts and ensure that these life-saving services reach all women. This is an urgent priority because more than 600 women in Asia die each day from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and only 48 per cent of women go through delivery with a trained attendant, the consequences of which are tragic. The lifetime risk of maternal death in Asia is 18 times greater than in Europe. Fortunately, from success stories of countries in the region, we know that major progress can be achieved.

Fistula

Another challenge to women's health is obstetric fistula. This is a tragic condition caused by prolonged labour and lack of health services. The baby almost always dies and the mother is left ruptured and damaged, and often rejected by her family, left to suffer in silence and shame.

Fistula can be prevented and it can be treated. Last year, UNFPA started the first global campaign to end fistula, and is working to expand services to many countries in Africa and here in Asia. Surgery is 90 per cent effective and costs about \$300. Today, two million girls and women are awaiting treatment.

HIV/AIDS

Another challenge that we must confront is HIV/AIDS. Though HIV/AIDS came later to Asia, its spread has been swift, especially in the most populous countries of the world. Unless serious measures are taken to stem the epidemic in its early stages, the consequences could be ravaging.

With no cure in near sight to stop AIDS, the first line of defense remains prevention. Large-scale prevention efforts have halted or reversed the spread of the epidemic in a growing number of countries, including Cambodia and Thailand. We must build on these successes and expand effective interventions. Efforts must be scaled up nationwide so that information, education, counseling, as well as care and treatment, spread faster than the virus itself.

UNFPA supports the initiative led by the World Health Organization, called "three-by-five", to provide three million people with anti-retroviral treatment by 2005. One entry point for providing voluntary counseling and testing, prevention and treatment is through existing family planning and maternal health care facilities. The link between reproductive health and HIV infection should not be

overlooked, since HIV is a reproductive health matter. As we scale up treatment, we must also scale up HIV prevention. And we must break the silence, stigma and discrimination that fuel the AIDS pandemic. The commitment of top political leaders is crucial to an effective response. At UNFPA, HIV prevention is a top priority. We are focusing on three strategic interventions:

1. Ensuring that information and services reach and involve young people, especially adolescent girls;
2. Ensuring that women and their children can remain HIV-free; and
3. Ensuring that condoms are accessible, and used correctly and consistently.

Youth and Gender Equality

Today there are great challenges posed by an ageing population as well as the largest youth generation in human history. Greater investments must be made for both segments of the population.

Today, adolescents comprise more than 20 per cent of the total Asian population. Most are married before the age of 20 and, sadly, many girls are married as young as 13 or 14. These marriages are often forced and result in early pregnancy and childbearing, both of which post a grave health risk to adolescent girls. This is a fundamental violation of their human rights. Action to promote later marriage and to sensitize parents and communities to the dangers of early marriages is urgently needed. All women and girls have the right to make their own choices about getting married and starting a family. Ensuring the equal rights and dignity of all family members is an important step in ending discrimination and violence against women and girls. Gender violence is more than a physical assault; it is an assault on the soul, which leaves an open wound that never heals completely.

Expanding rights and opportunities for women and girls is critical not only for the well-being of families but also for the health of society and a country's development. If given a chance, women lend their energy and expertise to social and economic progress.

Today, let us pledge to strengthen efforts to promote women's rights, reproductive health and gender equality. Let us support policies that help parents balance work and family responsibilities and encourage the equal participation of men and women in all areas of family and public life.

And let us pledge to do more for the young generation and to work with them side by side for positive change. This is the first youth generation to grow up with the threat of HIV/AIDS and the looming ghost of death as part of their everyday lives. We must join forces to ensure that this young generation has a chance, not only to survive, but also to enjoy a quality of life and to make an active contribution to the well being of their families and their societies.

The point I want to stress is that the current bulge in the youth population presents an unprecedented opportunity for growth and transformation if there is a concerted, massive investment in education, health care and employment. Young people need education, information, counselling and reproductive health services to protect them from unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. At UNFPA, young people are a priority focus.

CONCLUSION

The ICPD Programme of Action and the Key Actions remain feasible, affordable and effective. The consensus agreement reached at the ICPD by 179 governments and reinforced at its five-year review in 1999 represent a balanced and pragmatic approach to population and development issues--an approach centred on human rights, women's empowerment and sustainable development.

As Ministers and parliamentarians, you are uniquely placed to offer leadership that is required to push the ICPD agenda forward. You can set priorities and budgets, build partnerships and strengthen efforts to empower people to claim their rights. Your governments participated in the consensus reached in ICPD and the ICPD+5. And only you know how best to implement the ICPD effectively within the context of your national laws, communities and culture. We stand by you every step of the way in your efforts to achieve the goals of the Programme of Action.

Greater cooperation and partnership will push us further ahead. If we are to look at the status of funding to achieve the ICPD goals, we find that donor countries provide half the amount they promised in Cairo. They agreed to provide an annual amount of \$6.1 billion by 2005. Today, they contribute \$3.1 billion. There is a \$3 billion dollar shortfall in funding, and this shortfall is one of the reasons why we are not making greater progress. Let us pledge to keep the commitment that was made in November 2002 in Ottawa at the International Parliamentarians' Conference on the Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, to devote to 5 to 10 per cent of national development budgets for population and reproductive health programmes.

During this 10th anniversary year, UNFPA is calling on all donor governments to meet their funding commitments and on governments that receive international assistance to create an environment that promotes women's rights and sexual and reproductive health. We call on people everywhere to take steps to end violence against women and girls.

To every Minister and parliamentarian working for human dignity and equal opportunity for all, we at UNFPA salute you. To every official working hard to move forward the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, we are grateful. And to all of the women Ministers and Parliamentarians who are taking steps to empower other women, we thank you.

Let us all go forward and never forget those for whom we work. Let us try to support and assist them as if they were members of our family because they truly are. We know that in today's world there are many competing demands and emergencies. But it is up to each of us to continue to work, with persistence and creativity, for a wider understanding of what is at stake and what needs to be done. By keeping the promises that were made in Cairo, we will make greater progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals to reduce the suffering and poverty afflicting so many of our fellow citizens today. As the United Nations Secretary-General has stressed, the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, cannot be achieved if the questions of population and reproductive health are not squarely addressed.

Human rights have been in the hearts of many people throughout history. But we can feel proud to belong to the first generation that dared to imagine a world where all people enjoy their human rights, and to take action to help make it happen.

Thank you.