

As written

GOVERNMENT OF SAMOA
Ministerial Speech Presented at The Hague Forum
NETHERLANDS

Mr President, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a real privilege being able to represent Samoa at this important Forum, sharing with you and developing a Plan of Action that will improve the dignity and life styles of all women, indeed all mankind into the next millennium. Samoa has developed not one, but several Development Programmes, many already in existence before Cairo. With emigration being exceptionally high, other demographic indicators pointed to a decreasing trend, thus, our total population only increased insignificantly in the last 10 years. Our latest Census confirmed this trends. Our focus even before Cairo, was therefore on improving the quality of life of our people.

Our first strategy was economic - attempting to improve the distribution of our national wealth amongst our people. Secondly, we worked hard to empower our women improving attitudes and breaking down cultural and traditions that were hindering womens' development as decision makers in terms of their health, number of children and indeed their own lives.

Samoa was the first Pacific Island country to establish a Ministry of Womens' Affairs in 1990 and in 1992 we were again the first to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Indeed, Samoa is the only country in the world that has a public holiday for women – the Monday after the Mother's Day in May. Another honour now enjoyed by the women of Samoa is the eight weeks maternity leave for all mothers on full pay. This fact is further emphasized when you consider that we have NO SIMILAR HOLIDAY FOR MEN. All mothers receive gifts from fathers and children, and indeed womens graves are decorated with flowers on this day.

In terms of education, while we are still working on the number of women entering secondary and tertiary levels of education, the albeit fewer women at the top level are not only out-performing men but this year government scholarship list show women out-numbering men by the ratio of 1.3 to 1 .O. Women now totally dominate all senior positions in their own areas of responsibilities in both government and NGOs. We have an established National Advisory Council of Women, two National Women Organizations (and yes they do work in harmony together.)

A national Policy on Women, and a National Plan of Action is now being considered, and will be in place by the year 2000. Women occupy many other positions of responsibility from Cabinet level down.

The Samoa Family Health Association plays a vital role working together with the Ministry of Health in providing reproductive health and family planning services in the country. A relatively new NGO – Mapusaga o Aiga – has greatly increased awareness of issues related to violence and sexual abuse of women and improvements have evolved. As our women are better educated, they are making decisions, such as putting the quality of families first – and not just a slavish belief that adequate numbers will ensure that some children will develop into good productive bread winners for the extended family. Infant and maternal mortality rates have greatly improved, especially in relatively isolated rural areas. Our vaccination campaign has been most effective, achieving 97% coverage, and the new health problems are now life style oriented rather than communicable diseases.

Although Samoa is an island, we recognize that our resources are not unlimited and we need to ensure sustainable development of resources, carefully evaluating the environmental impact of each and every new development initiative. Indeed the South Pacific Environmental Agency is headquartered in Samoa. We have National Policies already approved, or in their final drafts on every development strategy from : Food & Nutrition, the Elderly, Women, Land Use, Waste Management, Water, Forestry, Health Sector Strategic Plan and a National HIV/Aids Policy with a specially created Council to implement and oversee that policy.

Since Cairo, Samoa has committed itself to address more fully the area of adolescent health and especially the reproductive health needs of our young people, young women in particular. We have a National Youth Policy in the development stages-this is being managed by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, however, it is a holistic approach with the active participation by NGOs and many other government Ministries, especially the Education and Health departments. The strategy is that the youth themselves should run their own programmes.

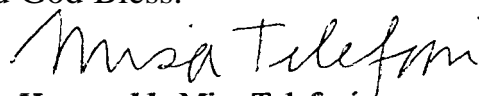
Samoa has achieved much since Cairo, but we recognize we still have a long way to go. We recognize the need to commit more resources to people oriented policies – putting human developments ahead of other priorities. Fortunately, with the assistance of our traditional aid partners, and all UN agencies our basic infrastructure development is at an advanced stage, and we can now focus on more people oriented policies,

our current ruling government stated priority areas are health and education.

We have achieved much in terms of our economic development, and a strong private sector driven free market economic structure is in place. Now we must ensure the benefits are equitably distributed.

Mr President, we thank UNFPA and Dr Sadik for taking such a strong leadership role in these initiatives. In the Pacific region we have been ably lead by Mr Jose Ferraris, and until recently by Ms Etta Tadesse of UNFPA. WHO, UNESCO and UNAIDS have also played an important roles to improve the human development of our people. The policies are wisely conceived so as to help us help ourselves, thus a more permanent infrastructure is in place. The commitment and motivation has always been there, and we could not help but respond positively. Certainly, since Cairo, awareness of womens issues are at an all time high in our history. We look forward to a better future, better world where men and especially women and our children can live their lives with dignity, and make their own educated choices for their own benefit and welfare.

Faafetai and God Bless.



Honourable Misa Telefoni

Minister of Health

SAMOA