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MADE AT THE HAGUE INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON ICPD+5

Mr. President

Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It was just less than 5 years ago in Cairo, when Solomon Islands pledged and committed itself to the International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action (ICPD POA). At that time, we promised to give high priority to issues affecting our young and fast growing population. We knew and were fully aware that attaining the goals of the ICPD Program of Actions was not going to be easy. There were already glaring challenges for us to face, these were:

1. A scattered population living in small villages and islands dispersed over a vast oceans with very high costs in transport, communication and service delivery;
2. A very high illiteracy rates of about 80 % for women;
3. A great disparity between a high population growth rate and lower levels of employment and social service provision; and

4. Limited access to primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Confronted with these challenges, and recognising our own limitations (in terms of resources, technological capability and capacity), we had to set specific strategic priorities for achieving the ICPD POA. These priority strategies include, inter-alia:

1. Giving population issues a high national profile by shifting population issues as integral part of the National Economic Planning and Development;
2. According a high national priority to education and health sectors which received an average of 15 % and 12 % share of the total annual national budget expenditures respectively;
3. Strengthening the Primary Health Care (PHC) approach for the delivery of health care and services to the population;
4. Establishing partnerships and strengthening collaboration between public and private sectors, including NGOs;
5. Intensify interventions to prevent, control and eliminate, where possible, the leading causes of mortality and morbidity, especially to the vulnerable groups such as women and children; and last but not the least
6. The provision of quality basic education for all children and development of school curriculum on priority population issues.

With these strategies, we had made some inroads and encouraging progress towards achieving the goals of ICPD POA, in particular in those areas related to reproductive health, population policy development and strategies, and civil society participation. The reproductive health issues has been fully integrated into the main stream health services and major component are taken on board.

Participation of churches and NGOs has been a major thrust towards achieving a reduction of maternal mortality and childhood illnesses. The population policy has been approved and endorsed by the government. This will set a major frame work for population-based socio-economic development. The endorsement of the National Women's' Policy in 1998, also is a major mile stone for women development and empowerment. However, reaching women can be quite challenging given the low literacy rate among women population.

There are, however, other areas of the ICPD POA that still remain as challenging, but we believe they are not impossible to achieve. We look forward to learning more, from the lessons learnt and the wealth of experiences of other distinguished delegations at this forum. I could not agree more with the notion that although the Cairo meeting in 1994 is a milestone in population development, it can not be regarded as a blue print to address population issues. The means and approaches are very much determined by the prevailing circumstances. What works in one country may not be a perfect model in another. It is important that the approaches are made adaptable and ensure that the goals of the ICPD POA are achieved with affordable and sustainable resource requirements.

Like other countries in the Pacific Region, Solomon Islands has made progress in the last five years since the Cairo agenda in 1994. The magnitude and degree of the achievement depend very much on structural, socio-economic and political environment of the country. We have learnt one most important lesson in our experience in the process of implementation of the Cairo ICPD Program of Action - that is unequivocal national commitment, effective partnerships and collaboration, and community support and participation are essential elements that can be utilised to combat the more challenging population issues.

A new and rapidly increasing challenge is the effect of the -economic downturn of the country which rely heavily on primary industries. Solomon islands responded to this situation by embarking on economic policy and structural reform which resulted in development of a Medium Development Strategy (MTDS) 1999-2001. The underpinning principle of the MTDS is that developmental initiatives will be population or people focused. This takes into account the need to fully integrate population issues into all sectoral development plans and strategies.

In November 1998, Solomon Islands joined other Pacific Islands Countries in Nadi, Fiji, to review the ICPD POA, less than five years after Cairo. It is amazing to note the progress and strides that have been made in the region. Given the vast variation of geographical and socio-economic status, one thing is quite common, that there is a recognition that population issues can no longer be confined to one sector alone. A wider representation is required to combat this multifaceted issue. The meeting also enable the Pacific Islands Countries to share and learn from each other of areas of successes, failures and the future directions.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that at the end of this forum, we will prepare to enter the new millennium with vigour and renew a more practical commitment to achieve the goals of ICPD POA. While policies can be formulated and approved, there is no 100 percent guarantee that it can be implemented under a new administration. It is the intention of my government, therefore, to develop legislative basis for formation of the National Population Council as stipulated in the National Population Policy. This will be our future directional frame work to address population issues as well as showing our renewed commitment to achieving the goals of ICPD Program of Actions. Despite our national renewed commitment, we will still

continue to rely on external assistance and support in a lot of our endeavours to enter the new millennium with a healthy, happy and productive population.

Finally, Mr. President, I wish to join the other distinguished delegates to express our esteemed gratitude and appreciation to the people and the Government of the Kingdom of The Netherlands, our host , for organising this international forum, and to the UNFPA for its invaluable support to Solomon Islands.

I thank you Mr. President.