

Cook Islands
Country Statement
Honorable Nandi Tuaine Glassie
Minister of Health

**United Nations Special Session of the General Assembly on the
International Conference on Population and Development Beyond
2014 - Assessment of the Status of Implementation of the
Programme of Action**

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Cook Islands delegation, I am honoured to deliver our country statement United Nations Special Session of the General Assembly on the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014.

Cook Islands committed to the ICPD Programme of Action in 1994 and we remain committed to the progressive and forward-looking agenda that it envisioned. These are embedded in our own National Sustainable Development Plan and National programmes. Last year, along with other Pacific Island countries we endorsed 18 elements of the Moana Declaration – a declaration looking at progressing ICPD in the 21st century for the benefit of all persons living in our countries. These principles have also been reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of the 6th Asia and the Pacific Conference on Population and Development in 2013 that we believe are an important reflection of our regional commitments.

Cook Islands is a country with 15 islands and atolls spread over 1.8 million square kilometers of ocean; considered an Upper Middle Income Country with one of the highest gross national incomes in the Pacific and supported by a strong tourist industry. My country is on track to achieving the MDGs and key elements of ICPD, particularly those related to universal primary education, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and addressing HIV. No maternal death has been reported in the Cook Islands since 1991 and we have 100 percent of births attended by skilled birth attendants and 100 percent antenatal coverage. Our infant mortality rate of 5.8 and under five mortality rate of 7 are amongst the lowest in the world. Ensuring every person's sexual

and reproductive health and rights have been central to our achievements in this regard and continue to remain so.

Our National Health Strategy addresses maternal health, family planning and sexual and reproductive health, including for adolescents and young people. We are progressive in ensuring our children are exposed to Comprehensive Sexuality Education so as to allow them to exercise their rights and protect themselves. We believe that strengthening parent-child communication in this regard is important. Rates of teenage fertility have been reduced by a quarter since our 1990-1998 figures were recorded and the contraceptive prevalence rate is 48%. However, much more needs to be done. We intend to prioritize adolescents and their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including through Comprehensive Sexuality Education and establishing accessible and confidential Sexual and Reproductive Health and mental health services both in in-school and out-of-school settings.

A Family Law Bill was passed in 2010 and the Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment & Strategic Plan of Action till 2016 is being implemented. The Cook Islands Government would like to see more women in parliament and are exploring opportunities for increasing women's participation, with women being represented but at a much lower level than men.

The Pacific is addressing an unprecedented pace of population ageing, with approximately 12 percent of our population is 60 years and older. We are putting in place strategies and incentives with our National Human Resources Development Plan to attract Cook Islanders back to the Cook Islands, to address the net outflow of young people seeking tertiary education and employment outside the country. Non Communicable Diseases are a most serious health concern and the Cook Islands Government is committed to combating this epidemic through legislative reform, health policy and programming to promote healthy lifestyles.

But we believe that this is not enough. 20 years after ICPD, we consider that governments cannot endorse acts of violence and discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity and that this violates the basic human rights that all people are entitled to. The Cook Islands acceded to CEDAW in 2006. We are concerned with the high levels of violence that exist in all forms against women and girls. We recognize persons of different sexual orientation and gender

identity as equal to mainstream gender identities and recommend an integrated response to gender-based violence in all Sexual and Reproductive Health programmes and services.

We are cognizant that we are in the 21st century, where young people are exposed to social media and new technologies and that now more than ever, we need to ensure they receive the full benefits of knowledge and evidence and receive the maximum opportunities for education and employment. We would like to ensure our girls remain in school, that they are educated to the full extent as are our boys and that they are empowered to navigate their lives being able to both articulate and achieve their dreams.

At the 6th Asia Pacific Population Conference of 2013, the Cook Islands were one of the 12 sovereign Pacific nations that strongly endorsed the outcome statement. These were also reinforced in the 12th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women in 2013 in the Cook Islands.

We committed to addressing the crosscutting nature of population issues, vulnerability to climate change, globalization and environmental degradation. We committed to increasing women and young people's participation in decision making and in political, social and economic processes at all levels. We support inclusive sustainable development strategies and to responding to the specific needs of persons with disabilities, including those from vulnerable and marginalized groups.

We commit to scaling up national efforts to address HIV and meet the goal of ensuring universal access to HIV education, including addressing the rights of People Living with HIV and the treatment, care and support they need. We are committed to ensuring this happens free of discrimination, including removing legal and policy barriers that impede access for vulnerable populations.

We call for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights to be guaranteed, ensuring that women, young women and girls, including those with disabilities, receive comprehensive SRHR services that respect their human rights throughout that life cycle.

We recognize that people are the most vital resources of the national and that issues of internal and external migration, urbanization and urban growth in the Pacific are critical to ensuring that people have secure access to land, sanitation, housing, water, energy and transport.

We need to address the root causes of migration and poverty and are committed to ensuring the rights of internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum seekers in the Pacific. We believe that a vibrant civil society is important ensure the success of the inter-governmental process.

The Cook Islands wants to see the commitments of the 6th APPC carried through into the Post 2015 global process. We believe that the 20th year of the review of the ICPD marks a moment in history where we need to have the courage to ensure the human rights of all people, as envisioned in the ICPD Programme of Action. It is also a moment where we must all recognize, now more than ever, that we are first and foremost governments whose human rights obligations include ensuring the enabling environments necessary for all individuals to live free from violence and discrimination.

Without these rights, development cannot be sustainable. Towards this, we believe the global process needs to be built on the progress achieved by governments in the regional ICPD review conferences, with stronger commitments to end inequalities and enhance the rights of our most marginalized peoples, with a specific focus on women, young people and adolescents.

Thank You.

22 September 2014