



REPUBLIC OF KOREA

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666 UNITED NATIONS PLAZA, SUITE 300, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017. TEL: 371-1280

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STATEMENT

by

H.E. Cha Heung-Bong
Minister of Health & Welfare
Head of Delegation of the Republic of Korea

at

The 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

2 July 1999
New York

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 1994, the international community committed itself to a comprehensive plan of action integrating population concerns into all economic and social activities. This Special Session of the UN General Assembly is an opportunity to evaluate how effective we have been in implementing the goals and commitments established in Cairo. Our task at this Special Session is to set a steady and sure course for the international community for the new millennium on this vital global agenda.

In the years since Cairo, real progress has been made at the global level, in particular, for the reduction of maternal and infant mortality and fertility rates, the expansion of reproductive health care systems and the empowerment of women,

However, a frank evaluation of our progress will recognize that we are still faced with daunting challenges in several key areas. In addition, there is a great deal of regional diversity regarding the challenges encountered.

- First, political will for the advancement of the Cairo commitments in many developing countries has been weakened by the recent financial crisis and continued economic stagnation as well as frequently recurring natural disasters;
- second, while many countries still suffer from problems caused by rapid population growth, other countries are struggling with the changing population structure;
- third, reproductive health and rights still remain critical areas of concern. In addition, unsafe abortion is becoming an increasingly serious issue; and
- fourth, financial resources necessary for implementing the commitments made in Cairo have yet to be fully mobilized at both national and international levels, causing serious impediments to an expeditious implementation of the Cairo Action Programme.

Notwithstanding all these challenges, we should not understate the crucial importance of having achieved an international consensus on the principle of people-centered population policies and programmes. Now, we should map out new strategies to translate these principles into concrete actions.

Mr. President,

In the Republic of Korea, we redirected our population policy in 1996 from an emphasis on quantity to quality and welfare of the population, mainly focusing on the improvement of the standard of living of the Korean people.

Even though the Republic of Korea successfully completed the process of “demographic transition” by keeping the total fertility rate at 1.7 since 1987, new challenges have emerged, such as the high prevalence of unsafe abortions, increasing sexual problems among adolescents, the imbalance of the sex ratio at birth and the disintegration of families.

The adoption of the new national population policy, thus, was very timely and appropriate in addressing the new population challenges, which the Korean society is currently facing.

Under the new national population policy, the government of the Republic of Korea promulgated “ the Health Promotion Law”, which is aimed at providing the Korean population with better health and reproductive health services. In particular, the government of the Republic of Korea has given priority to major reproductive health issues in designing, implementing and evaluating national health promotion programmes.

Considering the broader dimensions of reproductive health care, we believe that it is crucial to establish health systems at the national level, which could provide a package of services, including family planning, safe pregnancy and delivery, and the prevention and treatment of reproductive tract diseases. In this context, the government of the Republic of Korea is carrying out “ the Maternal and Child Health Demonstration Project “ in 23 public health centers. The project has been designed to provide comprehensive reproductive health services for the local population, and will be gradually expanded through the whole country.

Mr. President,

The growing youth population needs adequate reproductive health care. Programmes providing appropriate information and services related to reproductive health should be developed with the full participation of young people, their parents, families and civil society. The Korean government has carried out sex education and counseling programmes in schools to protect adolescents from unwanted pregnancy and sexual violence as well as to teach them responsible sexual behaviour. The government of the Republic of Korea will carry out further efforts to raise public awareness and to extend the scope of the programmes related to reproductive health care for adolescents.

Women are recognized as a fundamental force in the quest to eradicate poverty and maintain the stability of families and societies. Without improving the status of women, we can not expect any real progress in achieving the goals and commitments of Cairo. Enhancing gender equality and empowerment of women, as we already reaffirmed in the ICPD, are cornerstones of people-centered population policies. Political, economic and social discrimination against women should be eliminated as soon as possible. Education, especially for the girl child, is critical in empowering women.

The government of the Republic of Korea has put in place a series of laws, which are aimed at protecting women **from** sexual and domestic violence, promoting women's capacity to actively participate in society, and increasing equal employment opportunities. In particular, under the current financial crisis, a law was enacted preventing women from being dismissed from their workplace based on their gender. Furthermore, the government of the Republic of Korea established the Presidential Commission on Women's Affairs in 1998 in order to plan and execute policies and programmes for women in an effective and integrated manner.

Mr. President,

Giving special attention to vulnerable groups of our societies is also crucial in successfully moving forward the Cairo commitments. Vulnerable groups, such as the low-income class, the aged, the disabled and the unemployed usually lack the resources to access sufficient health services, including reproductive health services. To enable them to become productive members of society, the government of the Republic of Korea has tried to establish a social safety net by enacting related laws and implementing specific programmes. The Livelihood Protection Law was revised to secure income and promote health and welfare of the low-income class. Furthermore, the national pension system, a major sector of our social safety net, was expanded to the entire population as of April 1999, in an effort to provide secure public protection to all people.

Mr. President,

Carrying out a population and development agenda should not be confined to individual nations, but rather should be a global issue. Thus, the establishment of a full partnership among countries, international organizations and civil society is one of the most important elements in achieving ICPD goals.

The Republic of Korea is always mindful of the valuable support provided by the international community during the early phase of its development process. Now, we hope to share the lessons, experiences and know-how that we have learned through our own development process with other developing countries, especially via South-South cooperation.

We firmly believe that of the many elements of South-South cooperation, the issue of population is an area of particular importance since the population problem is closely related to the socio-economic fabric of countries. In this context, the government of the Republic of Korea has carried out population-related cooperation programmes through the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), with the principle of sharing our acquired knowledge and know-how in this field. Technical cooperation and human resource cooperation are major areas of **KOICA's** activities with individual countries. In addition, KOICA is developing health-related programmes in collaboration with research institutions, NGOs as well as other government sectors.

The Republic of Korea will make continuous efforts to form constructive partnerships with developing countries in order to contribute to the implementation of the Cairo commitments.

Mr. President,

The goals and commitments we set in Cairo are ambitious but we believe, attainable. We now should send out a renewed and clear signal of a new path toward real human development for the 21st century.

Thank you.