

**MEDIA NEWS RELEASE**  
**(sent to radio and newspaper)**

**Seminar Title:**        **Population & Development and Reproductive Health –  
engaging Parliamentarians in supporting the welfare of people**

Date:                        20-21 June 2006 --- 2 days

Venue:                      Parliament House, Tarawa

Co-funded by:            United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)  
Pacific Parliamentary Assembly on Population and Development  
(PPAPD)  
Secretariat of Pacific Community, SPC  
Min of Health  
Kiribati Family Health Association, KFHA

***What were the objectives of the seminar?***

1. To engage Parliamentarians in the discussion of Population and Reproductive Health (RH) issues as they relate to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Kiribati.
2. To establish mechanisms for involving MPs in supporting the implementation of Population and RH programs in Kiribati.

**Participants**

Kiribati Parliamentarians participated at the seminar.

Board members of Kiribati Family Health Association also attended to familiarize themselves with population and RH issues. Seminar facilitators include representatives from UNFPA & SPC in Fiji and the local team from Ministry of Health and Kirib Family Health Association.

***What were the key issues discussed?***

1. Parliamentarians were taken through the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and how they link with Population and Development in Kiribati. It was noted that MDGs were already incorporated into the National Development Strategies and the Population Policy of Government. Parliamentarians supported the MDGs and agreed that poverty reduction is a priority for Kiribati.
2. Reproductive Health, including the need to use family planning and the need to provide services for women during pregnancy and childbirth was also discussed. The seminar discussed how Family Planning is very useful in ensuring that families have enough food and supplies in the home and to send the children to school. Large families breed poverty whereas smaller-sized families can break the poverty cycle and allow social and economic development to grow.

Parliamentarians indicate that better education will help in future generations. However, at this stage, many young people drop off at Form 3 level because of lack of spaces in high schools.

Parliamentarians agree that while Family Planning is beneficial for families to raise the standard of living and quality of life, they are also concerned with the views of the church. The seminar discussed that it is important that the church is involved in the discussion of family planning so that there is better understanding with couples and families on what they need and still respecting the teaching of the church. As we can all see, big families with many children are struggling and going through hardship. Hospital records are showing increase numbers of children with malnutrition related to poor feeding in the home. Many of these children come from big families, the seminar heard.

3. The seminar also discussed Youth issues in Kiribati – including smoking and taking alcohol at such young ages like 14-15 years old. It was also noted that some young people are engaged in sexual relations as early as 14 years. This exposes them to the risk of sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and unplanned teenage pregnancy.
4. The seminar discussed that we need to protect the development of young people giving them accurate information and guidance and helping them cope with the challenges facing youth. Parents continue to have a big role to play in the home. They need quality time with their children. But if there are too many children, they don't have this time available for every one. Therefore the need to have just the right number of children they can afford to raise. Therefore family planning is important.

Church pastors and leaders need to provide more guidance on youth issues and also to address better family life – include moral values, respect and living in harmony.

5. The long term strategy for educating young people on how to face youth challenges is to introduce Family Life Education in Schools so that students learn from an early age right up to secondary school. In Fiji, the development of this curriculum has started, and Parliamentarians are interested that this is introduced to Kiribati to benefit youth in this country.
6. The seminar noted that Kiribati Family Health Association is an NGO that supports population, family planning and reproductive health. It is located in Eita and is run by staff and volunteers. It complements the services and programmes of the Min of Health.
7. The seminar concluded with a high note of interest among MPs who are agreed that they play a role in talking about P& D issues with communities. They also call on the Min of Health to work with nurses and doctors during their community talks so that accurate technical information about health issues are conveyed to the people.
8. MPs also indicated that funding assistance from PPAPD would be useful to help them travel around the islands and rural communities to conduct community meetings.

*Script prepared by Dr Rufina Latu from SPC Suva, Fiji.*

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