

**Fiji Country Statement on ICPD Programme of Action**

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***Dr. Jiko Luveni***

***Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation***

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The Chairperson, Honorable Ministers, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Fiji Government, it gives me great pleasure to address this important session. I extend my gratitude to UNFPA and UNESCAP for the invitation.

At the outset I am pleased to inform the forum that Fiji's new Constitution was assented to by our President just over a week ago. For the first time in the history of our beloved nation and in response to the strong wishes of our people, Fiji's Constitution has provided for a wide range of socio-economic rights. These rights include rights to education, access to health care, housing and sanitation, reasonable access to transportation, food security and safe water, and social security schemes. It is also the first Fiji Constitution to articulate specific rights to persons with disabilities and to all children. It provides for greater civil and political rights to youths through reduction of the voting age from 21 to 18 years ensuring their say in the political life of the nation. Furthermore, it outlaws any form of discrimination based on sex and gender.

While increasing numbers of young people in Fiji are getting married late or not at all resulting in low fertility, the fertility rate of 2.7 reflects the effect of the increasing teenage pregnancies. The urban population growth rate is 1.5% against -0.1% rural growth rate. According to a recent World Bank report, of the 32% poverty rate in Fiji, poverty in the rural population stood at a high 44% while poverty in the urban population is 25%. The report noted that the high poverty rate is attributed more to monetary poverty as food poverty was a low 7.5%. NCDs are the number one killer in Fiji with increasing deaths due to cancer. Amputation of limbs due to diabetes increased from 300 in 2006 to approximately 800 in 2012.

The effect of climate change and natural disasters such as increasing intensity and frequency of tropical cyclones and flashfloods has very significant negative impact not only on the economy of the country but also on the population challenges. Affected families are reduced to poverty living and there is increase in domestic violence and sexual violence that lead to unintended pregnancies in displaced persons. The availability and accessibility of reproductive health services particularly contraceptives becomes a major issue. Moreover, the special needs of

vulnerable population groups such as women, persons with disabilities, children and senior citizens is a major challenge and that it should be embedded in the national development plans.

The government recognizes the importance of gender equality and empowerment of women for equitable and sustainable development. This is proven through its increased budgetary allocation from \$200,000 annually up to 2006 to \$1, 010,000 in 2013. Subsequently, there have been significant achievements in raising the social status of women through economic empowerment programmes, effective campaigns to reduce violence against women and children, upgrading and expanding scope in capacity building, leadership skills, etc. and overall participation in the national development process.

Fiji has a relatively young population with 57% below the age of 30. In response to this fact, A National Youth Policy is in place to address the needs of adolescents and youth in relation to community and family support, employment opportunities, participation in the political process and access to education and quality reproductive health services.

The social protection programs of the government include the provision of cash transfers and food vouchers to almost half of the poor category, the single mothers and all those who are 70 years and over. Relevant legal frameworks with resources and structures are also in place for our senior citizens and Persons with Disabilities.

The Government of the Republic of Fiji believes strongly in the value of education as a strong vehicle to ensure that its citizens are well prepared to live free and worthwhile lives. And as we continue to face the challenges of population demographics such as increased rural to urban drift, and changes brought through globalization, we need to ensure that we have an education system that is flexible and responsive to better mitigate the impacts of such challenges.

To conclude, given the fact that parents of the current era and certainly beyond 2015 are becoming better educated than the past generation, in partnership with other relevant Government Line Ministries and CSOs, the Fiji government will strengthen and mobilize community participation to:

1. Ensure the presence of the ICPD Programme of Action at community level through the Women's and Young People's Institutions including educational institutions;
2. Promote sexual and reproductive health including improving accessibility of contraceptives;
3. Take ownership of the campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls; and
4. Ensure the implementation and enforcement of existing legal frameworks to protect the vulnerable population groups.

Thank you.