



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE HAGUE FORUM MONDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 1999

On Monday, 8 February, delegates at The Hague Forum heard opening statements, and a panel discussion by the heads of UN agencies on follow-up to the ICPD POA in a morning and afternoon Plenary. Ministers and high-level representatives of governments and international organizations delivered statements on the operational review and assessment of POA implementation at the country level in an evening Plenary. The Main Committee met in the afternoon to consider the substantive theme of Creating an Enabling Environment for Further Implementation of the POA.

OPENING PLENARY

Nafis Sadik, UNFPA Executive Director, announced the election of Nicolaas Biegman (Netherlands) as President of the Forum. Biegman invited participants to observe a moment of silence for the late King Hussein of Jordan.

W.J. Deetman, Mayor of The Hague, welcomed delegates and expressed hope that they would reach meaningful conclusions in their deliberations. He highlighted poverty as a global problem requiring global solutions and addressed the problem of forced prostitution, one of the worst forms of modern slavery and a violation of human rights.

E. Borst-Eilers, Deputy Prime Minister of the Netherlands, said efforts to tackle population problems cannot be confined to birth control and family planning. She recalled the lessons from Cairo that broadened the debate to include reproductive health and reproductive rights and the need to eradicate poverty and empower women. She highlighted the need to ensure that the needs of adolescents are met and called for a more active approach with the involvement of civil society, voluntary organizations and the private sector.

Louise Frechette, UN Deputy Secretary-General, emphasized the importance of empowering women. While acknowledging the successes since Cairo, she warned that much more remains to be done. The spread of HIV/AIDS, particularly in developing nations, increases the challenge.

Nana Rawlings, First Lady of Ghana, focused on issues relating to African women. She identified a number of obstacles to achieving the POA goals, especially in the area of reproductive rights, including gender discrimination, customary practices such as ritual servitude and genital mutilation, and the feminization of poverty. She observed that adequate resources and a multi-sectoral, cooperative approach are needed and that women leaders must take the initiative. On legislative reform, she highlighted the ban on genital mutilation in Ghana and other parts of Africa, noting that legislative changes by themselves do not eradicate undesirable practices if they are not accompanied by resources and political will.

Elizabeth Aguirre de Calderon Sol, First Lady of El Salvador, stressed promotion of women-oriented activities as the key for improving equality of life for all human beings. She highlighted the primacy of the family as the first school of life where basic life-governing values are established. She outlined development plans, programmes and initiatives in El Salvador addressing: women's vocational opportunities; equality in and access to education;

discrimination and violence against women; sexual and reproductive health; the elderly; and women in the agricultural sector. She said delaying action delays development.

Nafis Sadik, UNFPA Executive Director, highlighted the commitment and work of the Dutch government, NGOs and youth organizations as an example for donor countries. She recalled efforts to achieve consensus in Cairo and the progress made since, saying the Forum would serve to appraise experiences, lessons and obstacles. She introduced the background document prepared by UNFPA, noting that it is intended as a starting point for discussion and is not a draft to be renegotiated. Stating that economic progress is built on a social foundation, she emphasized the need to move from prescription to action and highlighted the importance of partnerships.

Eveline Herfkens, Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation, expressed disappointment that little had been done to make financial resources available, and called on parliamentarians to bring this to their governments' attention. She noted that poor reproductive health results from misguided priorities. She highlighted the importance of reproductive health of adolescents, refugees and other displaced persons, effective multilateral partnerships and the role of NGOs. She noted the absence of the World Bank at the Forum and called for incorporation of the Forum's concerns into World Bank policies.

Baron Vaea, Prime Minister of Tonga, speaking on behalf of Pacific Island states, highlighted the remoteness of the Pacific islands, limited resources, large populations of youth and escalating migration as constraints to POA implementation. He noted progress in education and improvement of women's status. To sustain the momentum of progress, he called for sensitization of development partners to the need for continued partnerships.

Forum President Biegman introduced the rules of procedure, provisional agenda and programme of work, which were adopted by the Plenary. Delegates elected to the Bureau of the Forum Aicha Belardi (Morocco), I. Sall (Senegal), Gerald Sendaula (Uganda), Anwarul Karim Chowdhury (Bangladesh), Kiyotaka Akasaka (Japan), Datin Paduka Hajah Zaleha Binti Ismail (Malaysia), Elsa Berquo (Brazil), Rudolph Collins (Guyana), Alfonso Tuiran (Mexico), P. Boyajiev (Bulgaria), Jerzy Eysymontt (Poland), Victor Golovko (Ukraine), Rosa-Anna Weiss (Austria), Nicolaas Biegman (Netherlands) and Margaret Pollack (US). Anwarul Karim Chowdhury (Bangladesh) was elected as Chair of the Main Committee and J. Singh (India) designated as Secretary and *ex-officio* Bureau member. President Biegman said the Bureau would act as the drafting committee for the final document to emerge from the Forum.

Representatives from the Parliamentarians', Youth and NGO Forums, held in The Hague in the preceding days, presented reports of their deliberations.

PANEL ON FOLLOW-UP TO THE ICPD POA

Heads of UN organizations participated in a panel on follow-up to the POA. Gro Harlem Brundtland, WHO Director General, noted that since Cairo, more open debate has occurred on previously taboo topics related to sexual and reproductive health. She stressed that failure to address reproductive health needs is a matter of human rights and social justice. She highlighted increased attention to the previously neglected issues of STDs, maternal mortality



and morbidity and reproductive tract cancers, and pioneering efforts by NGOs in these areas. She noted that aid fatigue has worsened since Cairo and global resources for public health interventions have not kept up with increasing demand. Looking ahead, she highlighted maternal health and adolescent sexual and reproductive health as issues demanding particular attention. She expressed WHO's commitment to putting health in the center of the development agenda.

Carol Bellamy, UNICEF Executive Director, underscored that adolescents should enjoy the rights of access to education, health and other services, and said parents and teachers must be active in adolescents' education. She stressed the need for investment in girls' education, expanded approaches to safe motherhood and women's reproductive health, and political will. She highlighted the importance and effectiveness of peer programmes in preventing HIV/AIDS among adolescents.

Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director, stated that the AIDS epidemic has worsened since Cairo, with youth experiencing the brunt of it, particularly girls. He said AIDS is reversing hard-won gains in development. He highlighted that some countries have succeeded in reversing the trend with vigorous education campaigns and emphasized the need for political commitment, greater investment and technological breakthroughs.

Nafis Sadik, UNFPA Executive Director, said the global conferences of the 1990s demonstrate that social investment is fundamental to progress. She highlighted the need for a new development paradigm where macro-economic policies look at micro-level needs and stressed the need to incorporate communication with economic leaders into advocacy for population issues. She called for: a more integrated approach to reproductive health; involvement and education of men; improved data and knowledge; and maximization of resources to the social sector.

MAIN COMMITTEE

The Main Committee considered the first thematic issue, "Creating an enabling environment for further implementation of the ICPD POA." Chair Chowdhury stressed that the POA would not be re-negotiated. Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division of UN DESA, introduced the background paper's chapter on the thematic issue, highlighting historical deliberations on population and development issues and stressing advances in health improvements and life expectancy. He underscored the need for consensus on the meaning of the terms 'population' and 'development,' the importance of wide participation and comprehensive deliberations, the importance of using statistics and a sound knowledge base, and economic and political difficulties facing many countries.

Ensuing discussion highlighted institutional capacity-building, enhancement of partnerships, data needs and indicators for monitoring progress, strategies to increase awareness, and impacts of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) on the creation of enabling environments for population programmes.

Noting that cultural and traditional norms may hinder progress on adolescent and reproductive health issues, IRAN highlighted the use of pilot studies and negotiations among religious leaders, policy makers and academia as well as parental consultations to reach an understanding on methods, strategies and approaches. EGYPT stressed community mobilization, creation of partnerships, prioritization of high-risk groups and consideration of population in the wider context of global problems. GHANA called for simple booklets to help integrate population into planning and resource mobilization for censuses. The UK stressed public health systems and the need for partnerships focusing on outcomes that bring direct benefits to the poor. The US advocated maintaining quality of life as the priority, and emphasized coordination with financiers and businessmen in building coalitions and networks and the use of communication systems and technologies. ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA recommended addressing the impacts of the Y2K phenomena.

UGANDA and ZIMBABWE said SAPs have had negative impacts on national economies, undermined institutional capacity and hindered implementation of population programmes. CANADA proposed involving the IMF in design and planning of new programmes and in the population and development dialogue. SWEDEN and the NETHERLANDS said capacity needs should be identified from curricula in schools and other training institutions and cautioned that sector-wide approaches in the health sector may reduce the focus on reproductive health. BANGLADESH stressed decentralization of reproductive health programmes. NIGERIA supported strengthening and consolidating viable institutions,

clearly articulating training policy, and improving support mechanisms addressing women and poverty. The YOUTH FORUM emphasized access to education and employment, reproductive and sexual health, and private sector participation. LESOTHO called on governments to create or strengthen structures that coordinate collaboration with civil societies and to facilitate early inclusion of the private sector in POA implementation.

JAMAICA said a clear vision of the report's recommended structures and paradigms is essential to avoid the risk of misguiding governments. BRAZIL said the report should include more facts about economic and social transformation. Highlighting details of the POA and the importance of the human rights framework, the IUCN, supported by others, stressed their concern that the background paper does not reflect the essence of the POA. SOUTH AFRICA recognized debt financing and unsustainable resource use as fundamental problems undermining governments' ability to address poverty. Supported by NGOs and the YOUTH FORUM, she called for the cancellation of debt, especially for the poorest countries. NGOs stressed the need for clear and adequate rules on capital flows and a sound macroeconomic environment as preconditions to POA implementation. PALAU said elements that hamper implementation should be identified and eliminated.

SUDAN and the HOLY SEE called for greater emphasis on refugees and displaced people in the report. BURUNDI said sanctions and embargoes affect the most vulnerable members of society and negatively impact primary health and education services and, with LIBERIA, said countries emerging from conflicts or natural disasters should be given special assistance. Noting that migration is linked to other issues related to trade, environment and socio-economic development, CANADA suggested inclusion of these as well as factors leading to involuntary migration in the report.

The HOLY SEE said the background report inadequately addresses ageing and noted that communities and families should be prepared to assume responsibility for older people. He called for resources to support awareness and sensitization for family- and community-based programmes to care for the elderly. JAPAN and AUSTRIA highlighted implications of rapid population ageing. The NETHERLANDS said data is important for financial flows and called for information on the impacts of financial resources. SUDAN emphasized the need for social indicators that cover a diversity of socio-cultural norms.

OPERATIONAL REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF POA IMPLEMENTATION

Ministers and high-level representatives of governments, international organizations and NGOs delivered statements on the operational review and assessment at the country level of POA implementation in an evening Plenary. Recurring themes included the need for a multi-sectoral approach to population issues, financial constraints that have hampered developing country capacity to implement the POA, and the need for donor countries and organizations to increase their level of support.

Editor's Note: Due to space constraints, the ENB will not provide coverage of specific statements.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As participants began to settle into substantive discussions, the early Forum buzz swayed towards the inadequacy of financial resources committed by donors for implementation of the ICPD recommendations. Some participants suggested that this may become an issue of some controversy during the Forum. Both in formal statements and in the corridors, particular donors have come under criticism for failing to meet their funding commitments. Others noted that high-level political attendance is intended to signal a significant degree of political will to address the concerns.

THINGS TO LOOK FOR TODAY

BUREAU MEETING: The Bureau will meet at 8:00 am in the Vermeer Room to identify points from Main Committee discussions that could be included in the final Forum report.

PLENARY: Plenary will convene at 11:30 am in the Prins Willem-Alexander Hall. US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton will deliver a keynote speech, followed by statements on operational review and assessment.

MAIN COMMITTEE: The Main Committee will convene in the Van Gogh Room at 10:00 am to consider the substantive theme "Gender Equality, Equity and Empowerment of Women."