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43rd Session of the Commission on Population and Development

Agenda item 4: General debate on national experience in population matters: health, morbidity, mortality and development

**Statement by HE Mr Andrew Goledzinowski
Deputy Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

On behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum

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Mr Chairman

I am privileged to deliver this statement on behalf of the members of the Pacific Islands Forum. At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his informative reports on the theme of the Commission, namely "Health, morbidity, mortality and development".

Just a few months ago, we marked the 15th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development with a commemorative session in the General Assembly. During that session, the countries of the Pacific region reiterated our strong and unequivocal support for the ICPD Programme of Action adopted in Cairo in 1994. We acknowledged the significant progress Pacific Member States have made towards achieving the goals of the Programme of Action, but we also referred to a number of critical issues of particular relevance to our region that require urgent attention.

Two of these issues fit within the theme of this year's Commission and were identified in the Secretary-General's report as significant causes of morbidity and mortality. I would like to elaborate on these during our general debate on sharing national experiences.

Maternal mortality

Preventable maternal mortality and morbidity constitutes a significant health inequity, is an indicator of social injustice, and a serious human rights concern. Pacific Member States have undertaken strategies for accelerated action to address maternal mortality and morbidity. But

some countries in the Pacific still experience unacceptable and avoidable maternal deaths because women cannot access relevant services, including family planning, in a timely manner.

Access to quality emergency obstetric care for all mothers and voluntary family planning services should be available to all people, in all places, at all times, regardless of socio-economic, educational or demographic status. Equitable access to quality and affordable healthcare is a basic human right.

The empowerment and education of women is a critical factor in reducing maternal mortality. Pacific countries were honoured to join with other Member States during the recent Commission on the Status of Women to adopt the Commission's first resolution on maternal mortality and morbidity. The resolution took note of the 2009 Madang Commitment of Pacific Health Ministers on a range of health issues including maternal mortality and morbidity, as well as the 2008 Pacific Policy Framework for achieving universal access to reproductive health services and commodities. We welcomed the resolution's recognition of the relevance of this issue to the Pacific.

We wholeheartedly reiterate our commitment to work towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 5, including through the empowerment and education of women. We need to make further progress in securing the political representation of women in decision-making on policies which affect their health and human rights. In this regard we stress the importance of the education of girls and women, which will assist women in making informed decisions and being able to enter decision making roles. We also recognise that violence against women is a serious issue in the Pacific. At the 2009 meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum, leaders from across the region committed to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence. This included a commitment to increased Pacific engagement in relevant global initiatives aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women.

Non-communicable diseases

The Secretary-General's report highlights the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In the Pacific, the WHO estimates that NCDs cause about 75 per cent of deaths, and indications are that NCD-related mortality and morbidity, including disabilities, are rising. The health care costs related to these diseases are formidable, with as much as 60 per cent of the health care budgets in some Pacific Island countries and territories going towards expensive tertiary care. In addition, NCDs contribute to the burden of poverty and retard national development by impeding workforce productivity.

As the Secretary General's report states, many non-communicable diseases are preventable, especially through eliminating tobacco use, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol. With the support of development partners, including Australia and New Zealand, Pacific Island countries and territories are implementing the Pacific Framework for NCD Prevention and Control, which focuses on practical, cost-effective and evidence-based interventions that Member States can adopt to achieve a reduction in NCD risk factors, mortality and morbidity.

Mr Chairman,

The countries of the Pacific Islands Forum are committed to continue to improve the lives of people in our region. In partnership with the UN family, we are working to reduce ill-health, morbidity and mortality in our countries, and look forward to interacting with other Member States and sector experts on this matter during this week's session of the Commission.

Thank you.