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# PHILIPPINES

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## STATEMENT

by

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Commission on Population of the Philippines

at the

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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, the Philippine delegation warmly congratulates you and the members of your Bureau on your well-deserved election. We commit our full support and commitment to the successful completion of the tasks at hand for this 42<sup>nd</sup> Session. The Philippines also aligns itself with the statement made by the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. Chairman,

We are pleased to take part in this session as our way of renewing our commitment in contributing to the achievement of the major challenges and actions identified in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The Philippines, as the rest of the world, is facing the threat of the financial crisis that is weighing down most economies around the globe. But, as bold as our vision to be counted as one of the fast developing nations in 2015, our country stands resilient and has tempered down the impact of this global threat through our sound economic fundamentals. This global financial meltdown has not diminished, in any way, our resolute efforts to end poverty in the country. In fact, with our firm and purposive initiatives as a nation, we are optimistic of our chances to meet our poverty targets in 2015.

From 45.3 percent baseline figure in 1991, the proportion of people living below the national poverty threshold decreased to 32.9 percent in 2006. The poverty gap ratio has been narrowed down to 7.7 percent from its baseline data of 13 percent and the malnutrition among children five and under have been abated to 24.6 percent from 34.5 percent baseline. The decline in poverty incidence in the country can be attributed to several factors. One is the sustained economic growth of real gross domestic product (GDP) with an average annual growth rate of 4.8 percent from 2001-2006, driven by private sector participation. Another contributing factor is the prioritization of anti-poverty strategies in the Medium Term Philippine Development Plans. These development blueprints have strongly espoused poverty reduction as an overarching goal to which sectoral thrusts are aimed. Within this framework, the government has pursued various integrated and comprehensive national anti-poverty strategies including the *Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan* (Linking Arms Against Poverty), which focuses on asset reform, human development services, employment and livelihood, social protection and participatory governance. The government likewise launched an *Accelerated Hunger Mitigation Program* (AHMP) to address hunger from the supply and demand sides. The AHMP targets as high priority the 54 most-in-need provinces in terms of subsistence, food security, and population management.

Mr. Chairman,

Recognizing the intimate linkage of population with development as articulated in the ICPD Programme of Action, the country is also taking cognizance of the country's demographic situation as a factor of the country's development. The population growth rate in the country is steadily declining, from 2.36 percent in 1995 to 2000 to 2.04 percent in 2000-2007. As projected

by the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), if this trend continues, the population growth rate of the country by 2015 would be 1.8 percent, allowing a breathing space for the country to accelerate its economic growth. Nonetheless, we are aware that, although the rate of growth has declined, the volume of constituents that has added up to our social and economic concerns has increased.

The impact of population to poverty is evident in the country. The capacity of families to provide for their basic needs and education diminishes with increase in the number of their members. As such, the government has consciously integrated population management program component in its anti-hunger flagship program. The AHMP provides the context wherein the population management strategies are being pursued. The basic population policy is anchored on informed choice, respect for life, responsible parenthood and birth spacing. At present, the population management program is focused on promoting responsible parenthood, fertility awareness, responsible sexuality, birth spacing and natural scientific family planning. Within less than two years of implementation, there were more than 300,000 couples already reached by the program.

While the country is in the process of crafting a national population policy, strategic measures have been adopted to ensure the allocation of resources for reproductive health and family planning. This includes the allocation of about Php1.4 billion in the national budget for family health including the *Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and Nutrition Program*, family planning and reproductive health services.

Moreover, to improve access to reproductive health and family planning services, the local government units (LGUs) have been mandated to ensure provision of these services. Many LGUs have positively responded to this mandate by strategically enacting Reproductive Health and other population-related ordinances. Other LGUs have ensured allocation for reproductive health and family planning services as part of the Contraceptive Self-Reliance initiative.

Mr. Chairman,

While the human resource of the country is growing in numbers, we are simultaneously taking effort to address the deteriorating status on basic education among the children who will soon form part of the labor force. In recent years, the country is struggling with its relatively low basic education situation with an elementary participation rate of 85 percent, cohort survival rate of 75 percent, and completion rate of 73 percent. This indicates significant portion of school age population who are out of school in school year 2007-2008.

The country remains committed in achieving universal basic education and we are doing our best to improve on this critical area of human capital formation. Along this goal, the country has pursued various policy and program interventions not only in increasing participation among school age population but also in improving the quality of education. These include innovations and reforms in the delivery of basic education particularly at the local level. The Department of Education's Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA) serves as the framework for a coordinated sector-wide approach to the participation of major stakeholders in providing basic education.

The health condition of the labor force is likewise an important aspect of the quality of the human resource. Filipino health condition has improved over time as indicated by the longer life span for both males (67.8 years in 2005) and females (72.5 years). Mortality rates for infants and under-five children also declined from 30 infants in 2003 to 24 infants per 1,000 live births in 2006 and from 42 children to 32 children per 1,000 surviving children 0-4 years old. Improvement in the delivery of health services in the country have largely contributed to this condition. Reform agenda for health is continuously being pursued with the **FOURmula One for Health** as its main implementation framework. FOURmula One is designed to implement critical health interventions as a single package, backed by effective management infrastructure and financing arrangements. F1 is aimed at four program thrusts: (1) more, better and sustained FINANCING; (2) REGULATION to ensure equality and affordability; (3) ensured access and availability of SERVICE DELIVERY; and (4) improved performance in GOVERNANCE.

The country also recognizes that the efficient and optimized utilization of human resource is a key factor in development. In view of this, efforts to create more economic and employment opportunities form part of the strategy of the government to improve economic welfare among families. The incorporation of a Labor and Employment Chapter in the Philippine Development Plan, and its activation in the last two planning periods, made employment as the central goal of our development. This has been initially worked for, and founded on, the Philippine Decent Work Agenda designed to reduce poverty in line with the Decent Work Agenda of the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Mr. Chairman,

Another convergence between the ICPD and MDG is the issue on international labor migration. International labor migration in the country is occurring phenomenally. More and more Filipinos are crossing borders to seek for better economic opportunities. In 2007, there are estimated 4.1 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) abroad. Despite of the global financial crisis, Filipino deployment abroad has reached 1.1. million in 2008.

Although the country highly recognizes the very valuable contribution of the OFW's remittances to the economy (OFW remittances of \$17 Billion represents about 13.1 percent of the gross national product), the government's primary concern is to ensure the protection, welfare and human dignity of migrant workers. Along this concern, various policy and program initiatives have already been put in place such as the Magna Carta of Migrant Workers, Labor Code, the Overseas Absentee Voting Act of 2003 and the Anti-Trafficking in Person Act of 2003 to promote and protect the development including political rights of migrants. Measures and programs have also been adopted to maximize the remittances and their impact to families and communities and to efficiently integrate returning labor migrants.

Just last year, our country has successfully hosted the Second Meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) which was graced by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has stressed the importance of protecting migrants and maximizing the positive impact of international migration amidst the emerging global financial crisis.

Mr. Chairman,

In line with achieving environmental sustainability in the country as one of the benchmarks of the ICPD, MDG and the Agenda 21, the country is continuously exerting efforts at the policy and program fronts to protect the environment and ensure sustainable human development. One of the most significant efforts, which the Philippines is increasingly being known for, is its pioneering efforts on Population, Health and Environment (PHE) integration. In order to guide program managers on PHE, the country has firmed up a PHE framework that puts concretely environmental sustainability within the perspective of health and population.

Mr. Chairman

Within the framework of the ICPD PoA, the Philippines also recognizes the importance of achieving reproductive health goals as precondition for achieving economic development particularly in reducing poverty. The country also adopts the reproductive health paradigm which recognizes reproductive rights as an important component of human rights giving emphasis on the importance of individuals' capacity to make decisions concerning their sexuality and reproduction. By recognizing reproductive right as a fundamental right, the government is mandated to ensure the entitlement of all citizens to services and information necessary for them to attain the highest standards of health, including reproductive health.

***Maternal Health and Safe Motherhood.*** After several years of implementing the Program of Action of the ICPD, and other related conferences, the risks of pregnancy and childbirth remain as threats to women's lives. This indicates the greatest challenge facing the country in terms of achieving the MDG goals implying the need to accelerate concerted responses and interventions.

The latest data shows that there are about 162 mothers for every 100,000 live births dying due to complications related to pregnancy and child-birth. Although this indicates a decline from the 1998 MMR level, the deceleration is at a very slow pace reflecting an enormous challenge ahead for the country in achieving a goal of 52 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015.

The government, together with non-government organizations, has addressed maternal health concerns through a two-pronged strategy involving the provision of health services to pregnant women (safe motherhood) and provision of family planning services. The Department of Health has likewise instituted key policy reforms to reduce maternal mortality. All pregnant women are now considered to be at risk of complication of childbirth under the Basic Emergency Obstetric and Neonatal Care (BeMONC) strategy. This strategy aims to establish strategically located health facilities that provide emergency obstetric care for every 125,000 population. Currently, the country is targeting the establishment of 177 Comprehensive EmOC and 710 Basic EmOC facilities.

***Family Planning.*** Family planning in the country has been made as an integral part of development initiatives not only in maternal health and reproductive health programs but also in anti-poverty efforts. Despite this, however, the country is still challenged to address the high unmet need of couples for family planning. The contraceptive prevalence rate in the country is

50.6 percent in 2006 with a total unmet need of 15.7 percent, 8.4 for spacing births and 7.3 percent for limiting births.

As part of the population management program, the Responsible Parenthood Movement and Natural Family Planning (RPM-NFP) initiative is promoting the empowerment of couples and families and assisting them achieve their fertility goals through responsible parenthood and effective parenting, awareness on fertility, responsible sexuality, birth spacing and natural scientific family planning family planning. The provision of modern family planning methods forms an integral part of the birth spacing strategy through the safe motherhood program at the national level and through the comprehensive family planning and reproductive health programs in the local government units.

*Adolescent health and youth development.* The country recognizes the role of youth in nation building as indispensable. As such, the country is committed and doing necessary actions not only to mold the youth as responsible adults in future but also as productive citizens today. Addressing their needs, including sexual and reproductive needs, remains a priority concern for development initiatives in the country as Filipino youth today remains vulnerable to various threats to their health and well-being.

Teenage pregnancy is on the rise in the country, from 46 (per 1,000 women) in 1998 to 53 births in 2003. Teenagers who have begun childbearing have grown from 18 percent to 26 percent in 2003. Moreover, most of the pregnancies among adolescent were unplanned and have resulted to induced abortions, which have been estimated to have reached 319,000 cases in 2000.

As response, several sectors in the country are integratedly implementing programs and initiatives on adolescent and youth health and development. The Adolescent Health and Youth Development Program (AHYDP) under the population management program is accelerating effort to provide necessary information and skills among youth and adolescents on matters related to their sexuality, health and development. Modular training packages on parenting adolescents have been developed and rolled-out at the community level to train parents and guardians on educating and guiding their adolescent on responsible sexuality and health.

NGOs and youth groups have also been active in enhancing environment for youth participation in planning and implementing projects that concerns them. The youth development planning initiatives at the local level are being pursued not only to capacitate youth in governance but also to harness their potentials as significant contributing sector in the development of the community.

Mr. Chairman,

Considerable improvement in women's status, as reflected in the improved political participation, employment, education, health and decision-making power of Filipino women, are being gradually realized in the country over the years. Yet, the persisting incidence of gender-based violence and discrimination against women in the country implies the need for more aggressive effort to protect women's right and to promote gender equality and equity.

Along this concern, the country has instituted several key legislations and programs aimed at empowering women and promoting gender equality. These include the passage of the Women in Development and Nation-Building Act, and laws promoting participation of women in productive and income-generating activities and laws addressing violence against women and children. In addition, a Framework Plan for Women based on the 30-year Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD) has been formulated. A Gender and Development (GAD) Budget Policy was likewise issued mandating the allocation of at least 5 percent of national and local government budgets for GAD initiatives. Furthermore, increasing number of local government units has enacted their GAD ordinances to comprehensively address issues confronting women to ultimately empower them and create enabling environment for their development.

Mr. Chairman,

The almost fifteen years of making real the ICPD promise has emboldened the country's commitment of improving the lives of Filipino people through better reproductive health and sustainable and equitable development. Some efforts have bear fruits and significantly contributed to human well-being as the paramount goal of the Plan of Action, the ICPD, MDG and other related international consensus. On the other hand, many letdowns in the implementation serve as of lessons that show the way to making the promises of these important international agreements felt by every Filipino.

The remaining years of implementing the country's commitment to the ICPD, provides opportunities for the country to sustain and scale up the gains at the same time reverse undesirable outcomes and situations. More than ever, the country reaffirms and remains steadfast in its commitment for stronger and more committed actions among all sectors in the country in implementing the critical actions contained in the ICPD Programme of Action as it contributes to achieving the MDGs and other international commitments.

Along this concern, we also urge more affluent nations, international donors and other partner countries to assist developing countries to implement the ICPD PoA to further improve their poverty and economic condition and other interconnected factors including population and reproductive health through sustained financing and technical assistance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.