

**Statement to the Commission on Population and Development
Acting as Preparatory Committee for the Special Session
of the General Assembly**

As written



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P R E S S R E L E A S E

It is a great pleasure and honor to have this opportunity to express the Palestinian views and experience with regard to the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Program of Action.

On behalf of the Palestinian Authority, I would like to express our congratulations to you upon your election as Chairman and our appreciation to UNFPA for having worked so hard in preparation of this committee meeting and for its continuous support for the Palestinian Ministry of Health. I would also like to extend our thanks and appreciation to the donor countries that have helped the Palestinian Authority in these programs.

The Palestinian National Authority, represented by His Excellency President Arafat, has given special attention to promote women's issues in general and women's health and rights in particular. This was emphasized in the Declaration of Independence in 1988 in the clear reinforcement and support for equality and nondiscrimination in public rights for women and men.

According to the census conducted during December 1997, the total population was 2.9 million including East Jerusalem. The following are a few other population statistics: Percentage of population under 15 years of age was 47%; the Total Fertility Rate 6.1; Infant Mortality Rate 24.5/1000; Maternal Mortality Rate 70/100,000; Growth Rate 4.08; and Contraceptive Prevalence Rate 45.2.

Although no explicit population policy has yet been formulated, the Palestinian Health Plan was developed in accordance with the principles and objectives of the ICPD Program of Action. Promoting reproductive health, including women's health, is the central theme of the Palestinian Health Plan.

The Plan, *inter alia*, aims for the following:

1. To reduce maternal mortality and high-risk pregnancy by 50%.
2. To integrate Reproductive Health/Family Planning services and **counselling** in the primary and secondary health care level.
3. To increase contraceptive prevalence by 25%.
4. To increase the proportion of women receiving postnatal care.
5. To introduce screening in nearly 50% of health facilities for early detection of breast cancer and cervical cancer.
6. To increase awareness of the population on reproductive health issues through mass media and other communication channels.

At the institutional level:

The Ministry of Health established the Women's Health and Development Directorate to be responsible for the development and monitoring of the implementation of Reproductive Health Policies in coordination with **NGO's**.

The Palestinian National Authority also established the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and developed the master plan for official statistics.

Our main goal in the Palestinian Authority is to strengthen Reproductive Health services including Family Planning/Sexual Health in order to reduce the infant and maternal mortality rate.

Since the adoption of the ICPD Program of Action, many steps were taken to integrate population concern into our strategies by strengthening institutional bodies dealing with such development issues.

Big efforts have been exerted to encourage men to take responsibility for their reproductive health in order to support women's health.

We at the Palestinian Authority's Ministry of Health have the determination and insistence to improve women's health and to go beyond the health sector by including the other Ministries in the planning and implementation of reproductive health policies and programs.

An Information Education Communication (IEC) Advocacy Task Force, comprised of the representatives of the Palestinian National Authority and NGO's, has been formed to coordinate the development and the implementation and monitoring of IEC strategies and activities to promote reproductive health/reproductive rights, gender equity, equality, and empowerment of women.

Although we have achieved considerable success with regard to these issues, we continue to face a lot of constraints including the following:

First, the availability of financial resources is limited and other obstacles in this regard include competing priorities by sectors, institutional management, and technical capabilities.

Second, is the unfavorable political environment and the communication difficulties created by the Israeli authorities, which hinder the implementation of these activities.

Under the theme of gender equity, equality and empowerment of women we should highlight efforts to incorporate gender perspectives in development programs, legal changes to promote the status of women, and insure gender equity to increase women's participation in decision making.

Primary health care facilities run by the Ministry of Health and NGO's provide antenatal care, natal, postnatal and integration of quality sexual and reproductive health services (Safe motherhood - FP - STD's - HIV). A program for the early detection of breast cancer and cervical cancer is being established in cooperation with local NGO's as well.

Future Goals and Actions of the Ministry of Health are the following:

1. To update quantitative goals of the Palestinian Health Plan in light of data made available by census and other surveys.
2. Increase investment in training and adoption of an integrated approach to training.
3. Strengthening IEC to help overcome socio-cultural barriers to access and utilization of reproductive health services.
4. Expansion of the reproductive health program aiming men and youth.
5. Building a partnership between the Palestinian National Authority, NGO's, international NGO's, United Nations agencies, the private sector and parliamentarians.
6. To mobilize financial resources to support the governmental programs and the NGO's.
7. Encouraging the establishment of an NGO Coalition networking with others at the regional and international level.
8. Supporting the peace process in the establishment of our independent state.
9. Enforcing the legal age of marriage and laws to eliminate all kinds of violence against women.