

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

As written

Mr. Chairman,

As you may recall, one of many recommendations of the 1994 ICPD in Cairo called upon all member countries (participating in the Conference) to implement reproductive health (RH) programs as an essential tool for the development of human beings all through different periods of their life span. Now, almost five years after the ICPD, after many guidelines and plans have been issued, programs reoriented and revisions made as well as a considerable sum of money being spent by us, I am of the opinion that we all have experienced both benefits and difficulties in undertaking this so-called "life span reproductive health services approach". I do believe that a list of the benefits will be much longer than that of the difficulties. And this preparatory committee is now providing us with a timely and most appropriate venue to hear and share our precious experiences about them all.

Mr. Chairman,

Experiences of success and failure derived from our past collective as well as national efforts in the pursuance of population and development policies and programmes indicated very clearly that to be really progressive and successful requires not just only good governance but also strong civil society and able citizen to take every action deemed necessary for their own sake. During the past decade, Thailand was one of the countries in East Asia, which was most severely affected by HIV/AIDS. It was forecasted that almost one million people out of the total population of around 61 million may be infected by HIV before reaching the year 2000. This is **inspite** of the facts that the Thai government has committed fully to head a strong, well coordinated policy against HIV/AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic, and that government has doubled its efforts to mobilize resources required for implementing an expanded response to this problem. Although millions of life may have been saved as a result of these leading roles of the government, it remains questionable for our future undertaking as to whether similar path should be followed or alternative choice should be urgently sought. The focus of our attention, at present, is on the process of capability building and empowerment in order to build up a more able and highly adaptive citizenship. If our future collective actions would be geared towards this direction, we believe that not only old problems like HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health, could further be alleviated, but also newly emerging problems of adolescent health and multifaceted problems of the older persons could be better prevented or handled.

I have also great pleasure to report that Thailand, with a population of nearly **61** million, in her sincere commitment to carry out the ICPD's recommendations and Programme of Action, has since mobilized the resources to design a Programme to integrate the new approach of reproductive health into existing family planning, MCH, STD & HIV/AIDS prevention and other related services. We are blessed with a fortunate situation: my country has gone a long way in establishing the required primary health care infrastructure responsive to the priority health needs. This is a strong social asset which greatly helps us in our attempts to expand the services to include all components of reproductive health. Along the way, we have revised and adjusted the implementation strategies to address specific situations and emerging problems in alignment with Thailand's overall national development plan.

Thailand's success in family planning and her embarkation on a broader reproductive health approach can be demonstrated by a number of satisfactory key health indicators. For instance, up to **95** per cent of the deliveries in the country was attended by trained health personnel. More attention and programmes have been geared towards women; in particular, greater attention is being given to the issue of safe motherhood, prevention of HIV transmission from pregnant mother to the new born, and alleviation of violence against women. Also, we have instituted pilot projects related to health services for adolescents and children.

In terms of the nation's population growth rate, Thailand has been able to achieve a milestone for the first time, population growth rate has dropped to below one per cent. It is currently at about the annual **0.9** per cent. This demographic bonus has enabled us to strengthen further our social foundation as it is essential for the country to strike a new balance in its socioeconomic and political development in line with what prescribed and targeted in the goals of the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action.

It is, however, unfortunate for Thailand and many countries in the Asian region, during the past two years, to have suffered from an economic crisis, which caused rapid contraction of government and private sector revenues. As a result of this serious economic downturn, all sectors have to review and reconsider their past performance and revise their development strategies and implementation schedules. The country's population development

and reproductive health programmes are of no exception. It is frustrating to see many activities and programmes reduced, postponed and even cancelled owing to budgetary cuts. That is our great price to pay for any complacency or unbalanced development, indeed a painful lesson learnt!

Mr. Chairman,

To endure these difficulties while minimizing the negative impacts on the part of the people who are most in need, **Thailand** will have to mobilize both technical and financial resources from outside to maintain or initiate some of both her current and new activities. Nevertheless, we still pledge to continue our technical cooperation and partnership programmes and to share our expertise and experience with other developing countries within and outside Asia. An alliance called the "Partners in Population and Development: A South-South Initiative" will remain to receive our strong support under the preview of our shared commitment as stated in the **ICPD's** POA.

Concurrently, to ensure desirable progress and achievement in the implementation of the ICPD POA within the context of Thailand socioeconomic dynamism, and prevailing politico-administrative process, Thailand sees an inevitable need to undertake an integrated, more decentralized, wider and more active participation of the civil society in its future approach. This is yet unlikely to be the case if it does not occur in parallel with the necessary efforts to undertake a total health care reform. We also need to learn from the others' experiences so that we would be able to map out the most effective and practical steps required for implementing these two complex and highly challenging endeavours.

Finally, I am pleased to state that we are optimistic that this preparatory committee meeting will yield new wisdoms, which will redefine and improve our efforts in fulfilling the ICPD Program of Action for our countries. **Let** us start the new millennium with clearer strategic thinking, achievable goals, and an appropriate reallocation of resources for reproductive health and sustainable human development. In this way, we will march together into the new millennium with a fresh commitment to equitable development under an expanded but integrative paradigm in the pursuit of better quality of life of our peoples.

Thank you.