



IRELAND

Statement by

H.E Ms. Anne Anderson
Permanent Representative

44th Session of the Commission on Population and Development

Item 4: General debate on national experience in population matters:
fertility, reproductive health and development

New York, 11th April 2011

Check against delivery

PERMANENT MISSION OF IRELAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS
885 SECOND AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10017 TELEPHONE 212 421-6934 FAX 212 752-4726
ireland@un.int

Distinguished Chair,

Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Although it is now almost seventeen years since the conclusion of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, the ICPD Programme for Action remains central to the international debate on population and development. The ICPD has consistently been a cornerstone of our shared understanding internationally that gender equality and the empowerment of women are central to our efforts to reduce poverty and vulnerability; and that all people everywhere have the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

The ICPD Programme of Action was the first time that the international community committed to the goal of universal access to reproductive healthcare by 2015, a target which was later integrated into the Millennium Development Goals. The ICPD made clear the link between a woman's right to the information and means to make autonomous decisions about her fertility, and the wider empowerment of women in every sphere of economic, social and political life. We now know that providing women with access to reproductive health care is not just an end in itself but can have a transformative effect on women's vulnerability to poverty, hunger and economic and social discrimination. Conversely, lack of access to reproductive health care remains one of the principal barriers to achieving real gender equality and ensuring that women are empowered to participate fully in the political, economic and social life of their communities and societies.

The continued importance and relevance of the ICPD is underlined by the unanimous decision of the UN General Assembly to extend the Programme of Action beyond 2014 and the 20 years originally foreseen. Ireland warmly welcomes this decision, and believes that the special session of the General Assembly which will be convened in 2014 to assess the status of implementation of the Programme of Action, and to renew political support for the full achievement of its goals and objectives, will be a milestone in the international debate on reproductive health and development. The worrying lack of progress in meeting the MDG targets on maternal mortality and access to reproductive health makes this initiative by the General Assembly all the more timely.

It is unacceptable that 200 million women across the world lack access to safe, effective and affordable forms of contraception and that up to half a million women die in pregnancy and childbirth each year, 99% of them in developing countries. It is absolutely clear not only that universal access to sexual and reproductive health care is central to achieving MDGs 4 and 5, but that without real progress in this area, none of the other MDGs are achievable. Ireland looks forward to engaging fully in the international debate on how we can speed up progress in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and ensure the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals by 2015

Mr. Chairman

The ICPD addresses a wide range of issues relating to sexual and reproductive health, including that of abortion. The ICPD Programme of Action underlines two important principles in this regard; first, that abortion should never be used as a method of family planning and second, that the availability or otherwise of abortion is a matter for decision by national governments in accordance with their national legislative frameworks.

Along with the other 178 countries which signed up to the ICPD Programme of Action, Ireland is fully committed to upholding these principles. Our starting point as an international community when we debate the issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights must be a clear acknowledgement that it is for individual member states to determine whether or not abortion should be part of the range of sexual and reproductive health services that are provided at national level.

This acknowledgement is consistent with the current position in international law. In the absence of any internationally recognised or agreed definition of the parameters of sexual and reproductive health and rights or sexual and reproductive health services, States are free to define SRHR and SRHS under national law. In this context, Ireland wishes to put on record that it persistently objects to any interpretation of SRHR/SRHS in international law as including abortion.

Concerning the position at national level in Ireland, the Irish Constitution acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, commits the State to respect and defend that right. In line with our constitutional position, Ireland does not believe that the right to sexual and reproductive health services includes an intrinsic right to access to abortion services. At the same time – and consistent with our commitment to the principles outlined in the ICPD - Ireland does not seek to influence decisions taken by other national governments on this issue. We accept that countries in which abortion is legal may define SRHR nationally as including access to safe abortion services, in the same way that countries in which abortion is illegal or restricted may exclude abortion services from their definition of SRHR.

Mr Chairman

Let me reiterate Ireland's strong commitment to a rights-based approach to development and to women's empowerment. Ireland's overseas development aid programme firmly places gender equality - and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective across all development issues - as a key cross cutting priority. Both bilaterally in our engagement with partner countries and in international multilateral fora, we have consistently emphasised the importance of gender mainstreaming as key to ending poverty, hunger, discrimination and vulnerability across the globe.

In this context, the achievement of universal access to reproductive health is a key priority for Ireland's development programme. It is absolutely crucial that all women, everywhere, have access to safe, affordable and appropriate methods of family planning. One measure of Ireland's commitment to this goal is the core funding we have provided to UNFPA on an annual basis in

support of its mandate, as well as separate contributions to the Global Programme for Reproductive Health Commodity Security, the Campaign to end Fistula and the UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting. We have also provided funding in support of reproductive health bilaterally to partner governments, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, and through civil society organisations.

Despite the hugely challenging economic difficulties we are currently facing in Ireland, with unprecedented pressure on all areas of public expenditure, our commitment to advancing reproductive health remains unchanged and I am pleased to announce that the level of Ireland's core funding to UNFPA will be maintained in 2011. We fully support the vision of the new Executive Director of UNFPA, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, and warmly welcome his leadership in advancing the agenda of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights globally. We look forward to working with Dr. Osotimehin, as well as with our other UN partners, to realise the vision set out in the ICPD Programme of Action

Thank you