

COOK ISLANDS  
COUNTRY STATEMENT  
By Head of Delegation  
Honorable Nandi Tuaine Glassie  
Minister of Health

**Commission on Population and Development  
Forty-seventh session**

**Assessment of the Status of Implementation of the Programme of  
Action of the International Conference on Population and  
Development**

Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Cook Islands delegation, I am honored to deliver the country statement at this **Commission on Population and Development 47<sup>th</sup> Session**.

Cook Islands was committed to the ICPD Programme of Action in 1994 and is committed to a progressive and a forward looking agenda from this 47<sup>th</sup> session of CPD. Last year, we endorsed, along with other Pacific Island Countries, the 18 elements of the Moana Declaration – a declaration looking at progressing ICPD in the 21st century for the benefit of all persons living in our countries. I can assure you that the key elements of the ICPD are being addressed in Cook Islands through its embedding in our own National Development Plan and National programmes. The ICPD review undertaken in 2012 revealed that we have made significant progress in key areas of population and development but gaps remain that require further attention.

Cook Islands, a country with 15 islands and atolls spread over 1.8 million square kilometres of ocean, is considered an Upper Middle Income Country with one of the highest gross national incomes in the Pacific, supported by a strong tourist industry. The net outflow of residents, mainly young people and adults, over the past ten years to New Zealand has been significant. Outer island development is a challenge, exacerbated by steady outer island population decline,

particularly of young adults seeking tertiary education and employment, resulting in an aged population. Approximately 12 percent of the population in Cook Islands is 60 years and older. Thus, our key population concerns revolve around a declining population and ageing. We would like to see repopulation and are putting in place strategies and incentives to attract Cook Islanders back to the Cook Islands.

My country is on track to achieving the MDGs and key elements of ICPD; particularly those related to universal primary education; promoting gender equality & empowerment of women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; and combating HIV. No maternal death has been reported since 1991 and we have 100 percent of births attended by skilled birth attendants and 100 percent antenatal coverage. The infant mortality of 5.8 and under five mortality rate of 7 are among the lowest in the world. Rates of teenage fertility rate have been reduced by a quarter since 1990-1998 figures were recorded. The contraceptive prevalence rate is 48%.

In the Cook Islands, Non-Communicable Disease is the most serious health concern. The Cook Islands Government is committed to combating this epidemic through legislative reform, health policy and programming and promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Our National Sustainable Development Plan includes key elements of ICPD. A Family Law Bill was passed in 2010 and the Cook Islands National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment & Strategic Plan of Action (2011 - 2016) is being implemented. The National Health Strategy (2012-2016), also contains key elements of ICPD, including maternal health, family planning, sexual and reproductive health, including for adolescents. A national population policy is being developed with a focus on repopulation. The National Human Resources Development Plan has a focus on Youth employment. Women have been consistently represented in Parliament, but at a much lower level than men; three women sit in Parliament today. Cook Islands Government would like to see more women in parliament and are exploring means for increased women participation in the highest level of national decision making. While women are also playing an increasing role in business and the economy, they are the backbone of our families and communities. Cook Islands acceded to CEDAW in 2006.

As a relatively conservative society with strong traditional and cultural values, we in the Cook Islands believe that we can maintain our

cultural values and traditional identity, which are compatible with the rights of individuals, as outlined in the Human Rights Declaration.

We recognise persons of different sexual orientation and gender identity as equal to mainstream gender identities. We are progressive in ensuring our children are exposed to comprehensive sexuality education, so as to allow them to exercise their rights, of course with parental guidance, and to be able to protect themselves to reach their full potential. We are cognizant that we are in the 21st century where young people are exposed to social media, as never before and, now more than ever, we need to ensure that they receive full benefits of knowledge and evidence regarding healthy behavior - including sexual behaviour, healthy nutrition, physical exercise and mental health - as well as receive the maximum opportunities for education and employment. We would like to ensure our girls remain in school, that they are educated to the full extent as are our boys, and that they are empowered to navigate their lives being able to achieve their dreams.

My delegation strongly endorses the outcome statement of the 6th Asia and Pacific Population Conference of 2013 and the findings and recommendations of the ICPD Beyond 2014 review.

At the Sixth APPC, Cook Islands was one of 12 sovereign Pacific nations, a sub-region which has some of the most vulnerable populations, to support ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights for all our people, without discrimination on the basis of age, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation, economic status, religion, ethnicity.

We committed to addressing the cross-cutting nature of population issues, vulnerability to climate change, globalisation and environmental degradation.

We committed to increasing women's and young people's participation in decision making and in political, social and economic processes at all levels.

We want to see that there is increased support and protection for girls and young women, including enhancing access to education and comprehensive mechanisms for ensuring their access to sexual and productive information and services.

We support inclusive sustainable development strategies, and intend to respond to specific needs of persons with disabilities, vulnerable and marginalized groups.

We endorse the prioritisation of couples and individuals' access to contraception and information to make free and informed decisions about the number and timing of children, thereby preventing unwanted and unplanned pregnancies, and reducing the need for abortion;

Results of studies on Gender Based Violence reveal high levels of violence in all forms against women and girls. We recommend an integrated response to gender-based violence in all sexual and reproductive health programmes and services; given that Teenage Pregnancy is an issue in many of our countries, we intend to prioritise adolescent and sexual reproductive health and rights, including through comprehensive sexuality education, and establish accessible SRH and mental health services for youth in schools and other educational institutions, youth organizations, faith based organisations and communities, ensuring their meaningful participation.

While 14 Pacific countries took part in the ICPD Global Review Processes and took note of significant progress in many areas, much remains to be done.

We commit to scaling-up national efforts to halt the spread of STIs and HIV, and meet the goal of ensuring universal access to HIV education, prevention, treatment, care and support, free of discrimination; including removing legal and policy barriers that impede access for key affected populations.

We recognise the heightened social and economic risk factors for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) confronting the peoples of the Pacific, and recommend key actions to strengthening prevention and control of these disease which have significant impact on Pacific populations.

In addressing the unprecedented pace of population ageing in some Pacific nations, we commit to preparing for its social and economic implications for individuals, families, societies and the Pacific community.

We recognise that the issues surrounding internal and external migration, urbanisation and urban growth in the Pacific is critical so that the growing number of urban residents, including the poor, have secure access to land, housing, water, sanitation, energy and transport, as well as health, education and other essential services; address the root causes of migration and poverty.

We committed to applying a human rights-based approach to the issues of internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum seekers in the Pacific.

I am delighted to have in our official Cook Islands delegation my parliamentary colleague the Hon TangataVavia and two representatives of civil society, John Tangi, the Clerk of our Parliament and also the representative Cook Islands Family Welfare Association and John Hyde of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development. Cook Islands believes strongly in the involvement of civil society in the CPD process and we want to see the commitments of the APPC carried through not only into this CPD but into the Post 2015 global process.

This 47<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Population and Development needs to build on the progress achieved in the regional Sixth APPC with stronger commitments to end inequalities and enhance the rights and services of our most marginalised peoples.