

**STATEMENT FROM THE KINGDOM OF TONGA**

**BY**

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Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Officials, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today I bring you the warmest greetings, from the Pacific Kingdom of Tonga. To Her Excellency Dr. Nafis Sadik, Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of the UNFPA, and to the UNFPA Organization, please accept our heartfelt gratitude, for the outstanding and impressive manner, with which you have undertaken your most vital and demanding responsibilities, towards the whole world. To the government and the people of the Netherlands, we are deeply grateful to you indeed, for your most gracious hosting of this most important global forum.

Today, Tonga also welcomes this rare opportunity, for publicly acknowledging our heartfelt gratitude, towards the governments, the private sector organizations and individuals, who have so

generously donated financially, technically, and in all other ways, so that the hope nurtured by the united nations principles of individual personal welfare being a human right, may be made a reality, for the millions of our brothers and sisters, who have never dreamt of such possibilities.

Even in the face of the international economic constraints of today, there are still nations, private sector organizations, and individuals, whose generous spirit of altruism, continue to bring respite and hope to these millions, who would otherwise have lived and died within the devastating agonies, of the Twilight Zones of humanity. the Kingdom of Tonga, way out there in the pacific antipodes from this Forum, is a beneficiary of this global love and generosity, and for these we will always be truly grateful.

The task of this forum is to review the implementation of the IPCD Programme of Action, and within our 5 given themes. This task necessitates the appropriate understanding of the relevant local context.

Historically, Tonga's approach towards the key concerns of population and development, has always been an **integrated one**. As repeatedly confirmed in this Forum, education for all is the master key to human reproductive rights and welfare, and **thus** to

population and development. The Kingdom of Tonga was perhaps one of the earliest subscribers in the world. towards this truism, for in 1885 it made education for all, to the age of 13, free and compulsory by law. This milestone, with its natural far-reaching benefits, such as the 99% literacy above the age of 6, need no elaboration, suffice it to say, that like a master key, it has opened untold opportunities for the promotion of the human right to personal welfare which is the core objective of the IPCD Programme of Action.

The next key enabling factor for our purposes today, is the status of gender equality and women's empowerment. In this respect, Tonga is also very fortunate, in that its gender perspective is one of complementarity, and not of one gender domination.

Briefly, in the families, the men become the Landholders and the Heads of the Households, and are therefore in control of these responsibilities. The women, on the other hand, as daughters, have precedence over their brothers in kinship and social matters, and even to the extent where the social ranking of all, is derived from that of their mothers. With this traditionally complimentary gender perspective, the basic human rights of Tongan women have therefore always been in tact. 'The one area where empowerment has not been equalised is in the political arena, but this is largely a product of vocational habit, but not one of a philosophy of gender

Turning to the subject of government partnership with the community, Tonga, like other Pacific island countries, is a family and community oriented society. This means, that partnership between the community and organizations including Government, is a way of life. Indeed, in many areas of life in Tonga, the level of achievement far exceeds government input, and this is because of the very healthy levels of community initiative and participation. Given the delicate nature however, of reproduction – related issues,, Government – Community partnerships need to be sensitively handled, in order for them to succeed\_

Prior to the TCPD Programme of Action, Tonga had already been funding more than two thirds of its related activities\_ For the whole of this Century, Tonga had devoted. almost 60% of its annual budget to education and health. The enormous economic constraints and heightened problems of today however, means that these services will inevitably suffer, and these are our most serious concerns.

Within the context outlined above, Tonga's record in the area of family planning reproductive health and their associated issues, has been most favourable. The Annual Population Growth Rate is 2.2, the Infant Mortality Rate is 16, the Maternal Mortality Rate is 41, and the Contraceptive Prevalence Rate is 37%. As the

distinguished delegates can see, these statistics are already below most of the UNFPA targets for the year 2005.

Given the foregoing, the most natural conclusion would be, that all is well in Paradise\_ Unfortunately not, this is the case at all. Economically, Tonga will always be highly vulnerable to forces beyond its control. Take for instance, the terrible combination of smallness of land area, lack of strong economic resources, and the remoteness from the urbanized countries and markets. These factors alone mean, that we are locked into an economic fragility and vulnerability, which the pressures of an increased population would seriously damage.

As such, Tonga's real situation is, that the achievements noted above, are in fact the minimum required for our survival. As the Netherlands are locked into having to always **successfully** use dykes to keep out. the sea, so Tonga has to always succeed in its population management. For Tonga, this struggle is made even more difficult by our 40% youth composition of our population, and their very obvious implications.

It is in these very fragile context, that the assistance from the UNFPA to Tonga, in the last 25 years, have been most crucial while not large by international standards, they have been, and

continue to be the very funding which have made the differences which I have mentioned. They are crucial to the maintenance and improvements of the minimum population status which is crucial to our survival. It is our hope, that the UNFPA, will also assist us to give our high youth population the appropriate care and attention which they need. Just as the UNFPA partnership with Tonga has produced the outstanding achievements of today, so we are confident that it will continue into the future, not just to solve, but in fact to prevent the entrenchment of any obstacle to the fulfillment of our human rights to personal well-being.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you very much indeed for your kindest indulgence.