

As written

**The Hague Forum**

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Plenary Statement of the United States of America

Delivered by Julia V. Taft, Assistant Secretary of State  
for Population, Refugees, and Migration

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today to participate in this important review of the progress made and challenges ahead in implementing the ICPD Program of Action. Let me first affirm that the United States remains steadfast in its commitment to working in a global partnership to achieve the goals of Cairo. As you heard from Hillary Clinton, commitment to a better quality of life for all people is the guiding principle for all of us.

In Washington, we often say that "knowledge is power." And that notion is also at the core of the ICPD Program of Action. The goals of Cairo are to be promoted through the spread of ideas and knowledge. This process begins with education, especially for women and girls. It also involves the leadership of public officials at every level, the work of community-based NGOs and religious institutions, the broad reach of the mass media, and neighbor-to-neighbor communication -- all of which help people learn what choices they can make to create better lives for themselves and their children.

Alongside this revolutionary vision, the Cairo plan recommends the kinds of services all women and families need, through both public and private sectors, to help make sure that children are born wanted and that they survive and thrive.

A key principle of Cairo is that all couples and individuals should be able to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and have access to the information and means to do so. Cairo further affirms that women should be able to control their own fertility, while participating fully and equally in the development process. And Cairo recognizes that our young people especially need educational and employment opportunities, as well as sexual and reproductive health information and services, to make good and responsible decisions about their futures.

Our basic message today, almost five years later, is that Cairo is working. Of course, we still have 15 years to go on achieving the Cairo goals. Progress is uneven, and in some areas we've experienced some very serious setbacks. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to escalate faster than we can control it, and economic crises are reversing the gains that had been made in a number of countries.

As we meet this week to consider key future actions to implement Cairo, I would like to review briefly what we have done in my own country.

While we have achieved a decline in unintended pregnancies, we continue to have concerns about maternal morbidity and mortality, and HIV/AIDS incidence is still increasing among some groups, including women. In response, we have:

- increased funding for reproductive health services and expanded efforts to ensure their availability to all who desire them:

- provided additional funding to reduce the burden of HIV/AIDS;
- adopted a requirement that health insurance for employees of the U.S. government must cover contraceptives, a benefit that we are working to see extended to all women through private health insurance plans;
- approved the use of emergency contraception;
- increased funding for research on new methods of contraception and disease prevention, including female-controlled barrier methods;
- instituted programs to improve services to women and families who have suffered domestic violence;
- mounted a campaign to provide women's health information through a national hotline and a worldwide web site;
- disseminated a curriculum for health care professionals on female genital mutilation; and
- enforced parity in funding sports programs for girls and boys in schools and universities.

Another new law makes it a federal crime to harass, intimidate, or threaten women entering or leaving health facilities — thereby helping to safeguard women's reproductive rights. Mr. Chairman, in the United States, as in a number of countries, abortion is legal and safe. Yet, we know that in still other countries, unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal mortality, resulting in more than 75,000 deaths each year. As an urgent matter of public health, we must expand access to contraception and simultaneously seek to make abortion safe, in accordance with paragraph 8.25 of the Program of Action.

To accomplish these and so many other initiatives under the Program of Action, we absolutely have to have more resources. Since Cairo, our friends in the U.S. private sector have increased their commitment and their generosity in an impressive way. NGOs have been invaluable to making the Cairo goals a reality. American foundations have more than doubled their contributions to international ICPD programs since 1994, reaching more than \$240 million this year. And they are giving millions more to domestic reproductive health programs.

The United States is the world's largest donor of population and reproductive health assistance, and we pledge to try do more. Under the leadership of the U.S. Agency for International Development, we are working with government and NGO partners in more than 50 countries to expand the availability and quality of family planning services, safe motherhood, and HIV/AIDS prevention programs, as well as to increase educational and employment opportunities for women and girls.

We have had a long and fruitful partnership with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and we are very hopeful to be able to assure a funding level of \$25 million in fiscal year 2000. We are also seeking \$400 million for bilateral family planning and reproductive health programs and close to \$170 million for HIV/AIDS and maternal health. We're going to work very hard with leaders in Congress to see these requests approved. And we will be working with many other partners to mobilize resources on behalf of the Cairo agenda.

In conclusion, we have learned a great deal from the young people and other country representatives here whose lives have been touched by the Program of Action. With the inspiration they have provided, I am confident that we can sustain our energy and commitment as we go to New York next month. Together, we must rededicate ourselves to provide for a better quality of life for all people today and for generations to come.