Cook Islands Country Statement on ICPD Programme of Action Sixth Asia and Pacific Population Conference Mid-Term Review – Minister Vaine Makiroa Mokoroa

26/11/2018

Hon. Mr Vaine Makiroa Mokoroa
Minister for Internal Affairs

UNESCAP, Bangkok
26 – 28 November 2018

Madam Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, a warm Kia Orana to you all.

On behalf of the Government of the Cook Islands, it gives me great pleasure to address this important session to report the progress the Cook Islands has made in a number of areas as well as the challenges that remain.

We also take this opportunity to confirm that the Cook Islands remains fully committed to the ICPD agenda, the 2013 Ministerial Declaration and the Moana declaration.

A country’s commitment to any international agenda can be confirmed by its political will to incorporate the agenda into its legislative framework, national policy framework and budget process.

The Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2016-2020 is our country’s overarching policy document, it encapsulates our national vision: To enjoy the highest quality of life consistent with the aspirations of our people, and in harmony with the culture and environment.

The plan contains 16 goals with 66 national indicators to assess our progress in achieving national priority goals including:

- to improve welfare and reduce inequity
- to expand equal opportunity and improve economic resilience
- to provide productive employment to ensure decent work for all
- to improve health and promote healthy lifestyles including improving access to sexual reproductive health services
- to provide inclusive and equitable quality education
- to accelerate gender equality, empower all women and girls and advance the rights of youth, the elderly and persons with disability.
- to strengthening our resilience to combat the impacts of Climate Change and natural disasters

Each goal has linkages to the ICPD agenda and the SDG’s and therefore are relevant to ensuring that the Cook Islands maintains a healthy, sustainable and prosperous population engaged in development by Cook Islanders for Cook Islands. It is our national scorecard for development and forms the basis of my talk today. With a small population like the Cook Islands we must work smart not hard.

Under the NSDP sits the National Policy Suite. The Ministry of Internal Affairs his tasked with administration for most legal frameworks and social policy areas including civil society, children, youth, older persons, migrant workers, persons with disability and of course gender, women and girls.
Over the past five years we have worked in partnership with development partners to accelerate gender equality and empower our women and girls in many areas of life. We have completed the second iteration of the National Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy and implemented programs such as the Domestic Violence Legal Aid program improving access to justice. We passed the Family Support and Protection Act in December 2017 to protect and support victims of domestic violence, the UNDP’s SRIC-CC program which grant funding to establish farms and small businesses for women in the rural outer islands to improve economic empowerment and climate change resilience. Our successful Women in Parliament program resulted in an unprecedented election this year where we experienced a record number of female candidates which also resulted in our youngest ever MP and female MP Tehani Browne at only 22 years of age. At Head of Ministry level again we are experiencing record levels of women in leadership with women outnumbering men for the first time with 7 females and 6 males. What a time to be a woman.

The progress made in sexual reproductive health services and reproductive rights has been mixed. We are proud to be one of only a few countries to have no recorded maternal mortality due to our universal healthcare system, child welfare system and the level of antenatal care provided by the Ministry of Health. As NZ citizens, any complicated pregnancy cases can be referred to the NZ Health system. Every mother is entitled to 6 weeks paid maternity leave, a $1000.00 baby bonus, clothing gift vouchers and immediate qualification for the child benefit for the child up to the age of 14 years of age, with plans to raise the age to 16 in the new financial year. All mothers, without exception, in the rural areas (outer islands) or Pa Enua have access to free antenatal care and are flown into Rarotonga to give birth to minimize the risks to mother and newborn. We take good care of our mothers.

Early pregnancy remains a concern for the Cook Islands, with the Adolescent Birth Rate increasing from 24/1000 to 67.7/1000 in just five years from 2010 to 2015. The Comprehensive Sexuality Education program is a policy of the Ministry of Education which requires greater support and resourcing. The Cook Islands Family Welfare Association assume the role of training in the schools and throughout the community.

By far the most significant health issue for the Cook Islands is Non-communicable diseases (NCD’s). In 2016, 78.2 per cent of all deaths of Cook Islanders in the Cook Islands were caused by an NCD although this is an improvement from 83.9% in 2015 with more focus on prevention through primary care and education. Statistic also show that deaths caused by NCD’s are more prevalent in men than woman. I am beginning to see a common theme here.

The final issue I would like to discuss is urbanization and migration, especially of the younger generations. Today, the number of Cook Islanders living overseas is about nine times the resident population. It is a critical development challenge for the Cook Islands and affects all sectors, and particularly the Pa Enua (Outer islands).

To conclude, the Cook Islands Government’s relevant line ministries and CSO’s will work hand in hand to strengthen and mobilize community participation to:

1. Ensure the presence of the ICPD Programme of Action at community through Women’s and Youth organisations including education and religious institutions;
2. Promote sexual and reproductive health including improving accessibility of contraceptives;

3. Continue our campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls; and

4. Ensure the implementation and enforcement of existing legal frameworks to protect the vulnerable population groups.

Meitaki, Thank you