Mid Term Review of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development

Agenda item 3: Thematic discussion on emerging issues and gaps

Panel (b) Advancing gender equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

Statement of Pacific Island Countries and Territories (3 mins)
Delivered by the Republic of the Marshall Islands

1. Mister Chair, distinguished panelists, on behalf of 10 Pacific Island Countries and Territories, namely Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, I would like to express our appreciation for the informative remarks which challenge us to consider ways in which we can make further progress towards achieving gender equality and the realization of sexual and reproductive rights[1] in this region. We would like to congratulate all member countries on the significant progress that each member state has made in implementing and working towards gender-equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. We are proud of the achievements also made in the Pacific, a region that is diverse and culturally rich. Within each country our culture is a resource we have drawn upon to develop home-grown solutions to meet our national goals.

2. As has been noted by the panelists, investing in sexual and reproductive health and rights saves lives, advances gender equality, improves health and well-being. It helps girls to access education and women to find decent work which increases productivity and household income and the health and wellbeing of children. Yet, we recognize that inequalities in realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights intersects with, and is reinforced by, gender inequality.

3. We remain deeply concerned about the pervasiveness of violence against women and girls which is both unacceptable and a violation of their human rights[1]. We recommit to strengthening multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional policy and programmatic interventions taking into consideration cultural context where appropriate, which includes integrating prevention and response to gender based violence and sexual and reproductive health services and ensuring that survivors of violence have immediate access to critical services[2]. We recognize the need to increase investment in responding to and preventing violence across the region, and we are committed to changing the harmful gender norms that underpin gender based violence and to engaging men and boys in prevention of violence. Increasing women’s and young people’s participation in decision making and in political, social and economic processes at all levels remains a priority in the Pacific[3].

4. Across the Pacific there have been significant gains in relation to the ICPD agenda, however, statistics indicate that we continue to experience preventable maternal deaths, increasing adolescent birth rates and an unmet need for family planning. We recognize that enabling all couples and

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[1] APMD, 2013 para 44
individuals\textsuperscript{4} to seek information and access to the widest possible range of safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of contraception, will ensure that they are able to exercise free and informed reproductive choices\textsuperscript{5}. There is also a need to expand young people’s access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services that are rights-based and gender sensitive, while also strengthening the provision of comprehensive sexuality education, that is consistent with the evolving capacities of adolescents\textsuperscript{6} so as to enhance their social and economic opportunities and wellbeing. We support the right of all individuals – without discrimination of any kind, including on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity\textsuperscript{7} to enjoy the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health.

5. **Mister Chair, esteemed panelists** - while progress has been made in advancing gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, at this point of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration, the Pacific believes that the commitments made here in 2013 Ministerial Declaration remain highly relevant in order to address the unfinished agenda of the ICPD Programme of Action and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in our region by 2030.

I thank you for your attention.

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\textsuperscript{4} Pacific statement at APPC, 2013  
\textsuperscript{5} Based on United Nations Commission on Population and Development, 44\textsuperscript{th} and 45\textsuperscript{th} sessions. Resolution 2012/1.  
\textsuperscript{6} ICPD PoA, 1994. para 7.46  
\textsuperscript{7} Pacific statement, APPC 2013