

The Twelfth Asian Parliamentarians Meeting on Population and Development

MANILA RESOLUTION On WOMEN, GENDER, POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

13 February 1996

Manila, Philippines

Preamble

We, Parliamentarians of Asia, concerned with Population and Development met in Manila to devise a strategy to achieve a brighter future for the family of Asian nations, the world community as a whole, and our Mother Earth.

Aware of the international trends flowing from the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 1994), the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD, 1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW, 1995) we have gathered for three successive years (in Beijing, Tokyo, and Manila) to deliberate on the theme "Women in the 21st Century — A Strategy for Peace and Prosperity."

Based on our conviction that women's full involvement is crucial to the solution of population issues which threaten the quality of life for millions of people across Asia as well as the natural environment, we make the following set of recommendations to our parliamentary colleagues and our respective governments believing that such recommendations will lead to greater empowerment of women in all spheres of life, thereby enabling them to be more effective partners in the family and community, more able to realize their full potential in life, and more articulate in identifying and working with others to fulfill their unmet needs.

Notwithstanding the vastness of our region, our rich cultural, religious, political, and economic diversity, the wide variation in our development experience and stages of development, we act together in proposing the following:

Introduction

We affirm that without full and equitable partnership of women and men, it will be impossible to solve population issues and attain social development and sustainable economic development in harmony with the global environment. Achieving such partnership requires empowerment of women in all spheres of life — economic, social and political — by improving access to education and economic opportunities for girls and women across Asia. This will help improve women's status, expand their choices, as well as increasing their opportunities and ability to determine their own lives.

We recognize that population, sustainable economic growth, social development, security and peace are interdependent and mutually reinforcing, as are our efforts to reduce rapid population growth, eradicate poverty, protect the environment, create jobs and reduce unemployment.

We believe that the family is the basic unit of society and note with concern signs that its survival as a human institution is threatened. Inequities of power, gender, and income act on each other and all members of the family causing stress, tensions, even violence in the family setting. We therefore advocate strongly for efforts to improve gender equality as well as the effectiveness of population and other development programmes which are essential for survival of the family.

Recognizing the inter-relationship of poverty, rapid population growth, high infant, child and maternal mortality rates, we also urge countries of the region to accelerate the achievement of the targets set in Cairo.

Reductions in population growth rate and efforts to achieve environmentally sustainable patterns of development will fail without respect for human rights.

We also call attention to the fact that these goals will be unattainable without peace and justice. Women and children, always the foremost victims of war and civil strife, will continue to suffer disproportionately from social instability and continuing poverty. Therefore, we urge increased effort to achieve peaceful resolution of conflict and disputes throughout the region regardless of origin.

1. Women and Health

Universal access to appropriate reproductive health services including relevant education regarding sexual health and rights is a pre-requisite for improving the living conditions of individuals,

including adolescents, and the family as a whole.

We point with alarm to the high — and, in some cases, increasing— rates of pregnancy among adolescent girls through the Asian region, as evidence of the need to provide adolescents with full information, education, and services related to their reproductive rights and sexual behavior.

Furthermore, we express concern at women's continuing recourse to unsafe abortions which are detrimental to their health and welfare and which reflect the deficiencies of existing family planning services.

We hereby pledge our strong commitment to promote expanded and improved availability and utilization of gender-sensitive reproductive health and family planning services across the region.

We urge governments to increase budgetary allocations to women and gender-related programmes to counterbalance deteriorating economic conditions. These conditions place young women and children at increased risk of domestic and international trafficking, exploitation, prostitution, and involvement in substance abuse and illegal drug trade. At the same time we call on appropriate national and regional bodies to direct serious and immediate attention to these issues which destroy the fabric of society and thrive on indecision and lack of political will and community involvement.

We recognize that persistence of women's low economic and social status in many parts of the region is a violation of their human rights and deplore the fact that they are major factors contributing to the high rates of infant and maternal morbidity and mortality, the exposure of some girls to harmful and dehumanizing practices such as female genital mutilation, sex selection and the commercialization and improper use of new reproductive technologies, as well as sexual abuse, exploitation, violence and the explosive spread of STDs and HIV/AIDS infection. We call for urgent and immediate action from the community to the international level to eliminate all these conditions and practices.

2. Empowering Women in Society and the Economy

Two thirds of the world's illiterates are women, the majority of whom are in rural Asia. The education of girls and women is necessary to overcome this pattern for the realization of women's own potential as well as broader social and economic development in the region. The feminization of poverty — a phenomenon noted for some time— continues in both urban and rural areas.

We call upon our respective governments to work to institute compulsory education for all girls and boys on the primary and secondary levels and to ensure wide utilization of the opportunities provided. Furthermore, we urge special attention to achievement of greater equity between girls and boys in vocational and higher education in order to make them more employable and economically self-reliant.

In the context of the call for wider educational opportunity we emphasize the need to promote changes in the attitudes and practices of both women and men regarding their respective roles in and contributions to society, moving away from traditional gender stereotypes towards concepts of equality, mutual respect, and harmonious partnership in all spheres of life, in particular, homemaking, parenting, and general family responsibility.

We also call for the elimination of persistent patterns of gender bias in the recruitment, compensation and advancement of workers, regardless of whether the employer is government or private sector.

We urge particular attention to the distinctive and unmet needs of women who are heading households regardless of the reason.

We emphasize the need for women themselves to respect, value and give full support to other women to enable them to realize their full potential and to maximize their choices with respect to their various roles in society.

We call upon the media to recognize their important role in communicating the new ideas of gender equity and partnership between women and men.

3. Resources for Population and Gender-Related Issues

We take note of the strong international consensus on the need to mobilize significant domestic and external financial resources. Furthermore we endorse the estimates of resource requirements set forth in the ICPD Programme of Action. We accept the responsibility as elected representatives of the people to ensure translation of public support for Population and Development into workable programmes with the best feasible distribution of budgetary, human and administrative resources. Moreover, we urge that additional resources for Population and Development programmes should be made available by reorienting budgets wherever possible.

We call upon the donor community to strive to allocate the set target of 0.7 percent of their gross national product for overall official development assistance, to earmark 50 percent of this share for women, population, and gender-related activities and to monitor the use of those resources according to agreed upon mechanisms. We also urge governments to honor their resource pledges stipulated in various action plans and programmes.

We encourage interested developed and developing country partners to allocate, on a mutual basis, 20 percent of official development assistance and 20 percent of the national budgets for basic social programmes. This may be accomplished by reducing military expenditures.

We urge international financial institutions to ensure that structural adjustment and economic recovery programmes are designed and implemented in a humane manner, conducive to realization of social justice, the achievement of gender equity, and fulfillment of the needs of women and their families.

We emphasize the need to generate public support among our constituents for mobilization and allocation of adequate domestic resources to support policies and programmes on Population and Development.

4. The Role of Parliamentarians in Population and Gender-Related Issues

We urge governments to integrate gender perspectives into their development strategies, policies, and programmes, giving attention to the importance of gender issues in both objectives and management. We believe this to be particularly important in relation to legislation on Population and Development.

We recommend and endorse enactment of legislation which will enable governments to formulate and implement policies and programmes to improve the legal, social, economic and political status of women and assure them full enjoyment of their rights.

Recognizing that such action will not be easy we offer our support and will endeavor to promote greater awareness of, positive attitudes towards, and understanding of the complex inter-relationship between population, environmental conservation and sustainable development.

In the context of this effort, we commit ourselves to review and reevaluate women's involvement in politics in our respective countries. As representatives of the people and leaders of political life we accept our responsibility not only to advocate but also to act in our own sphere to build a more equitable society. In keeping with this, we will work to strengthen women's involvement in politics, particularly in decision making positions.

We recognize the need to develop and maintain good working relations with all who are active in promoting and implementing population, development, and gender-related programmes — the machinery of government, non-governmental organizations, women and men in the private sector.

In order to translate the action plans adopted at the major international conferences on the status of women into national legislation, we urge that appropriate research be carried out and that there be wide sharing of information and cooperation with technical experts in fields essential for addressing women's issues in the Asian region.

In this respect, we have a unique and important role. To fill this role effectively, we must develop networks among Parliamentarians at the national, regional and inter-regional levels. In particular, it is important to cultivate closer relations between Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) and other regional fora of Parliamentarians. Such networks will enable us not only to deepen our understanding of the interdependence between issues in society and economy but will also promote and expand cooperation in solving these issues through exchange of experience.

Based on our conviction that Asia should play a leading role in the solution of the world's population issues, we, the participants of the 12th Asian Parliamentarians' Meeting on Population and Development, make the above resolution to be forwarded to our respective governments. At the same time we pledge ourselves to work for the realization of this resolution.