

India's Remarks in the Ministerial Segment at Asia Pacific Population Conference, Bangkok, UNESCAP 16 -20 Sept 2013

Distinguished Chairperson, Excellencies, fellow delegates and participants, friends from civil society organizations, ladies and gentlemen:

At the outset, I would like to thank the Government of Thailand, UNESCAP and UNFPA for hosting this important conference and for being such gracious hosts. We have had over the past 3 days very fruitful discussions on national priorities and efforts, as well as the hopes and aspirations of this region for the future.

Friends, India has in the last two decades had one of the highest economic growth rates in the world, and this has opened up possibilities for poverty reduction and improvement in the living standards and aspirations of our people. We have embarked in this period on a set of policy initiatives and related legal changes that articulate a framework of key entitlements, human rights and participatory governance to guarantee the Right to Information, the Right to Education, and the Right to Food, and other progressive legislation such as the recent Mental Health Act. Major national programmes like the National Rural Health Mission and the new National Urban Health Mission have been launched with the objective of providing accessible, affordable and quality health-care to the most underserved, vulnerable and marginalized populations. These embody a comprehensive approach to meeting national health goals related to infant mortality, maternal mortality, fertility rate, under-nutrition, anemia, adolescent health, and improving child sex ratio; and to meeting the sexual and reproductive rights of all our people.

Your Excellencies, India like all the member states of the region is on the cusp of a transition from an older world with its challenges to a new one that is taking shape with different opportunities and possibilities, as well as issues and concerns that demand our attention. While we have not yet eliminated the scourge of maternal mortality and infectious diseases, we face a sharp increase in non-communicable diseases. Our people suffer from reproductive morbidities even as young people have new aspirations and the spread of the internet changes all our lives. We are sensitive to these challenges, and working to address all of these through dynamic policies and programmes.

We are a young country. Our 240 million adolescents have not only new possibilities and aspirations but also new challenges and demands. Our new Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health programme not only addresses sexual and reproductive health but also focuses on other areas for priority action such as nutrition, mental health, substance misuse, injuries and violence, including domestic violence, and non-communicable diseases - all critical for holistic human development of a young adult.

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Gender equality is at the heart of the ICPD agenda, and it is India's goal as well – one towards which we have been moving through a range of measures from increased participation in local self-governance to safety and freedom from violence.

India takes this opportunity to reaffirm its commitments to ICPD goals and to reiterate the guarantees of our Constitution that all our citizens will be equal before the law, and have fundamental rights to freedom of speech and expression, non-discrimination, and protection of life and liberty.

Distinguished delegates, India is proud to be part of this region that has demonstrated its capacity to consider and constructively debate new, even controversial, issues, in a spirit of mutual respect. Looking back on the ground we have covered in these last days I am inspired by what Mahatma Gandhi said, and I leave you with this thought “A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.”

Thank you.