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FORUM NEWSLETTER

Publication of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development

Food Production and Distribution are not Keeping Pace with Population Growth

AFPPD Standing Committee on Food Security Discusses Globalisation



Participants at the the Food Security Meeting



Mr. Shin Sakurai,
MP Japan



Mr. Lakshman Singh,
MP India



Sen. Dr. Malinee
Sukavejworakit

Bangkok, Thailand – AFPPD organised its first standing committee meeting on food security, water and globalisation on the 7th and 8th of February to discuss the increasingly important issue of food security in Asia and the role AFPPD could play in this area as well as what kind of programmes it could conduct. The two-day meeting was attended by thirty-five participants. This included twenty-four parliamentarians from Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, resource persons from UNESCAP, FAO, Angiang University Vietnam, the Wira Institute in Malaysia, and AFPPD staff.

The meeting was opened by Sen. Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary General of AFPPD. She told committee members that Mr. Yoshio Yatsu, MP Japan and Chair of AFPPD had discussed, during AFPPD's General Assembly held in Beijing last October, the importance of giving special emphasis to food security. She pointed out that agriculture is an important economic base of a nation and if that base is sound, then in times of recession, (as in 1998), people will not go hungry. Dr. Sukavejworakit explained having food alone is not sufficient – “we must have a distribution system so everyone can receive food.” In relation to globalisation, Asia is facing two problems. One is the open market and the other is the issue of GM food. “It is essential we discuss where developing countries' priorities lie. Food is essential for life and should be readily available for everyone, not simply to those who have purchasing power.”

‘No child should be born in to the world just to starve and die.’ Mr. Shin Sakurai, MP Japan and Chairman of the Standing Committee on Food Security said, quoting Mr. Takashi Sato, AFPPD's very first Chairman. Mr. Sakurai spoke a great deal on the WTO and the tight control developed countries have over weaker, developing ones. “In Africa, it is actually cheaper for Africans to import food than produce their own.” Mr. Sakurai felt very strongly that the African situation is a dangerous one and certainly not conducive to a sound agricultural base, which as Dr. Malinee previously highlighted, is essential for the good economic grounding of a nation. Weaker countries are not in a position to stand up and take on developing countries he told participants. “Each country should profile its food requirements and adopt policies to conform to those needs. Giving away our food indiscriminately to other countries is not the way forward.” In conclusion, Mr. Sakurai said international agreements must be examined, and the problems linking population and food must be urgently addressed. It is also imperative WTO focuses on and addresses these issues.

Continued overleaf.



Agricultural And Rural Development The Key To Sustained Food Security

Session one, chaired by Dato. Napsiah Binti Omar, MP Malaysia and AFPPD Treasurer, was dedicated to food security. Dr. D. B. Antiporta, Senior Policy Advisor from FAO's Regional Office in Bangkok provided a regional overview of the situation in relation to food security and poverty.



L. to R: Dr. Antiporta, Senior Policy Advisor, FAO - Dato' Ms. Napsiah Binti Omar, MP Malaysia and Treasurer of AFPPD

"Nearly three-fourths of the world's hungry and poor are in the South and Southeast Asian sub-regions and the rate of poverty reduction has decelerated in recent years," he said. The recent Asian Crisis resulted in increased food prices, which compromised the overall food security of vulnerable groups, and in particular, adversely affected the nutritional status of pregnant and lactating women, infants, and preschoolers. Poverty in the region is predominantly a rural phenomenon, with the large majority of rural people depending on agriculture and agriculture-related industries for employment and income. Indeed, even urban poverty indirectly arises largely from rural poverty.

Population Must Decrease If We Are To Achieve Food Security

A decline in population growth is essential in order to win the fight against poverty and food insecurity, Dr. Antiporta continued. In the Asia-Pacific region, it is evident that agriculture and rural development is the key to sustained food security, and empowering the rural poor is an effective way to address the scourge of hunger and poverty. "Provision of an enabling and conducive policy environment, and a supply of public goods, must be established," he said.

Another aspect to consider is rural industrialisation. It is imperative the rural non-farm sector is in a position to take advantage of the stimulus generated by agricultural growth. "The elements of empowerment," Dr. Antiporta concluded, "are far better when complementing measures are mixed rather than having more of one and none of the others."

Continued from front page

Mr. Lakshman Singh, MP India and Vice-Chair of AFPPD chaired the opening session. Speaking on behalf of Mr. Yoshio Yatsu, MP Japan and the Chair of AFPPD who was unable to attend the meeting, he noted that food security concerns every country and the welfare of its people. It is a burning issue exacerbated by rapid population growth and complacency is simply unacceptable. Parliamentarians must come forward and exchange their views freely and frankly. "We must ensure food security for the people of our countries by ensuring the protection and interest of the farmers from our respective countries," he said.

The vote of thanks was given by Mr. Shiv Khare, Executive Director, AFPPD.

Water Conservation Issues Frequently Overlooked

Water and its future was the topic covered in session two by Mr. Cengiz Ertuna, Chief of the Emerging Social Issues Division, UNESCAP. Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary General of AFPPD, chaired the session.

Water use in Asia is estimated to have increased threefold between 1950 and 2000, and this usage is expected to continue rising warned Mr. Ertuna. Asia accounts for 60% of world population without access to safe drinking water and 80% without hygienic sanitation. Two major factors contributing to water

scarcity, not only in Asia, but globally, are population growth and expansion of irrigated agriculture and industries.

Appropriate Management Of Water Essential

Water is a finite resource and it must be effectively managed if everyone is to benefit from it. The consequences of failing to manage water resources appropriately could be catastrophic and it is worrying that indiscriminate use and pollution of these resources continue. According to the UN Report for the Millenium Summit in New York, 'if present trends of freshwater consumption continue, two-thirds of the world's population will live in a 'water-stressed' condition by 2050...'

Turning to the tackling of the water issue, Mr. Ertuna specified various measures, which could and should be taken in order to improve the water situation. The four major areas he identified as essential for the promotion of water conservation were economic incentives, legal instruments, administrative measures, and dissemination of information and public education. Some of the constraints frequently encountered, however, are a shortage of financial resources, inadequate legislation and institutional machinery, and a lack of will to take action. "Water conservation issues are often not incorporated into overall water management policies or clearly defined in policy documents," he added.

In closing, Mr. Ertuna reminded participants of one of the United Nation's Millenium Declaration goals: 'to halve by the year 2015, ...the proportion of people who are unable to reach or afford safe drinking water.' He urged everyone present to heed this goal and do everything in their power to ensure its realisation.



Mr. Cengiz Ertuna
UNESCAP



WTO and Globalisation Making Food Security for Poor Nations Difficult

Eco-Systems Deteriorating - We Must Take Action to Protect Them Now

Food security and globalisation was discussed during session three with a presentation by Prof. Vo Tong Xuan, Rector at Angiang University, Vietnam and Director of the Mekong Delta Farming Systems R&D Institute. The session was chaired by Hon. Ms. Lorna C. Silverio, House of Representatives, the Philippines.

Prof. Xuan spoke extensively on the benefits and disadvantages of the World Trade Organisation, (WTO). Countries such as Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia, have all advanced thanks to effective trade relations with the US and the EU, and joining the WTO generates opportunities for the agriculture, industry, and service sectors he said. However, negotiations are indispensable before reaching an agreement between unequal partners, (trans-national corporations versus weak economies such as Vietnam), and inexperienced partners.

Asian Countries Fear Being Trampled By WTO

All though certain benefits are apparent, some Asian countries are wary of WTO. It is felt that developed countries are striving to dominate the developing countries, and some believe they could succeed through WTO. In agriculture, some fear patenting, including that of life forms, will further marginalise poor farmers, while bio-pirating will serve to enrich large companies. Other fears include the gradual destruction of the environment, many 'yet-to-come' restrictions imposed by large countries, and that the three main sectors of the economy, particularly the agriculture and industry sectors, are not ready for globalisation.

Prof. Xuan pointed out it would be feasible to join the WTO if high-income countries, the World Bank, (WB), and the International Monetary Fund, (IMF), could assist low income countries in improving rural development efforts, and boosting research to lower production costs and increasing yield, especially using biotechnological means. However, the WTO first needs to urgently improve transparency about its decision-making process and mechanisms, and there should be acceptable 'incomplete and conditional' exception clauses in all agreements for low-income countries. Finally, most markets should only be opened step-by-step. "Large corporations in the industrialised countries should no longer prosper at the expense of small farmers and inexperienced companies of low-income countries," he ended.



L. to R: Hon. Lorna C. Silverio, House of Representatives, the Philippines - Prof. Vo Tong Xuan, Rector, Angiang University, Vietnam



L. to R: Mr. Shin Sakurai, MP Japan - Mr. David Jezeph, Chief, Water Resources Section, UNESCAP - Prof. Timothy Marimuthu, former senator and Executive Director of the Wira Institute, Malaysia

Session four was chaired by Mr. Shin Sakurai, MP Japan and Chair of the AFPPD Standing Committee on Food Security. Presentations were given by Prof. Dato' Timothy Marimuthu, Executive Director of the Wira Institute in Malaysia, and Mr. David Jezeph, Chief, Water Resources Section, Environment and Sustainable Development Division, UNESCAP.

Prof. Marimuthu explained in his presentation on 'environmental factors linked with food security' that the concept of food security is inextricably linked with population growth and factors such as land, water, and air. Views on food security and population growth differ he said. On an optimistic note, the earth can support a population between 7.7 billion and 12 billion. This is based on the success of biotechnology and the Green Revolution, when food production has increased faster than the growth of the population. This surge in agricultural production was largely due to high yielding seeds, the use of chemical fertilisers, machinery, and irrigation.

Runaway Consumption Killing Our World

However, while the world may produce adequate food for its population, inequitable distribution mechanisms and trade barriers perpetuate food insecurity and poverty. Another issue that arises is the

depletion of the world's natural resources due to population growth. Rapid economic development as a strategy to cope with the increase of population leads to all sorts of environmental degradation, and of particular concern is the runaway consumption, especially energy consumption, of the developed nations. For example, climate changes caused by carbon dioxide emissions have led to severe disruptions in agricultural productions, thus leading to food shortages in affected countries, and a sixth of the world's land area, equivalent to 6 billion hectares, are now degraded as a result of overgrazing and poor farming practices.

"While efforts to increase agricultural production and to lower population growth are on-going, greater attention should be paid to the world's eco-systems, and steps must be taken to protect them," he said. "Each country must consider appropriate policies and educational measures to protect and sustain the natural environment."

"The Eight Millennium Development Goals cannot be met without ICPD Implementation."

Mrs. Thoraya Obaid,
Executive Director, UNFPA



Water Has A Complex Role In The Lives Of All Living Organisms

Mr. David Jezeph approached the subject of environmental factors linked to water. "First and foremost," he said, "we cannot live without water. It is essential to every aspect of living." Water plays many complex roles in human activities and natural systems. Systems interact through different global linkages such as cultural influences, environmental impacts, global governance, and trade. Less than one percent of the world's fresh water, (or 0.007 percent of all water on earth), is readily accessible for direct human uses. These resources are very unevenly distributed, ranging from deserts to where almost no rain falls, to the most humid regions, which can receive several meters of rainfall a year.

Global withdrawals of water to satisfy demands have grown dramatically in this century. Between 1900 and 1995, water withdrawals increased by over six times, more than double the rate of population growth. This rapid growth in water demand is due to the increasing reliance on irrigation to achieve food security, the growth of industrial uses, and the increasing use per capita for domestic purposes. Many experts predict that water availability will be one of the major challenges facing human society in the 21st century and that the lack of water will be one of the key factors limiting development.

It is estimated that at least 1.5 billion people use groundwater as their sole source of drinking water. Growing populations, expanding urbanisation and industrialisation, and increasing demands for food security are placing more pressure on the world's groundwater supplies.

Once Polluted, It Is Nearly Impossible To Purify Water

Around the world, human activities are poisoning groundwater with toxic chemicals – including nitrates from fertilisers and sewers, pesticides sprayed on farms, petrochemicals from leaky gas tanks, and industrial solvents discarded by factories. Once polluted, scientists warn it is nearly impossible to purify polluted aquifers and diluting the contamination is extremely expensive. Poor-quality and polluted water resources threaten eco-systems and biodiversity and helps spread diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and dysentery.

Lastly, Mr. Jezeph pointed out that poverty – not insufficient global food production – is the root cause of malnutrition. He explained that poor families lack the economic, environmental, or social resources to purchase or produce enough food. In rural areas, land scarcity and degradation, water salinity due to overirrigation, soil erosion, droughts and flooding can all undermine a family's ability to grow enough food. In urban areas, low wages, lack of work and underemployment, and rapid changes in food prices often place food supplies out of the reach of poor households.



Asian Countries Must Stand Up To Protect Their Way Of Life

Do parliamentarians have a role in food security? This was the question raised during the panel discussion of session five. Panellists were Hon. Dr. Gunasagaran Gounder, MP Fiji, Mr. Lakshman Singh, MP India and Vice-Chair of AFPPD, Dr. Muhammad Askin H., S.H., MP Indonesia and member of IFPPD, Hon. Chang See Ten, MP Malaysia and Mr. Eikou Kaneda, MP Japan and JFPF member.



L. to R: Hon. Chang See Ten, MP Malaysia - Mr. Lakshman Singh, MP India and AFPPD Vice-Chair - Mr. Eikou Kaneda, MP Japan - Hon. Dr. Gunasagaran Gounder, MP Fiji - Dr. Muhammad Askin H., S.H., MP Malaysia

WTO Imposing 'Uniformed Culture' On Asia

During deliberations, committee members, particularly the Japanese delegation, felt that WTO was trying to impose a 'uniformed culture' upon Asian countries and it was agreed that this should not be entertained. The road to an open market should be a slow process, taken step by step, and the Asian way of life must be protected. However, it was identified that taking a unified stance would be difficult as situations are country specific and there are significant differences in the ways governments work.

Next, the issue of nutritious and good-quality food was highlighted. Parliamentarians must ensure the food distributed to the public is safe and nutritious and to be certain of this, it was suggested that a focus be given to better legislation and regulations for food safety through Food Acts.

Parliamentarians Must Push The Issue Of Food Security Hard

However, in order for parliamentarians to play an effective role in not only food security, but any other issue, their knowledge base must first be increased. It is essential that they feel passionate about the issue and they use this passion to raise awareness among the general public and provide input at international conferences. Participation in parliamentary sessions is very important, and if a parliamentarian is motivated s/he could introduce a 'Private Member's Bill.' As one committee member put it, "parliamentarians talk the talk, but they also have to walk the walk."

Session six was the highlight of the meeting and saw the adoption of the Statement of Commitment.



Every Person Is Entitled To Food Security

Mr. Shin Sakurai, MP Japan, and Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary General of AFPPD headed the closing session. They hoped that committee members would take the



L. to R: Mr. Shin Sakurai, MP Japan - Sen. Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary General of AFPPD

valuable knowledge they had acquired during the meeting back to their own countries and put it to good use. Mr. Shin Sakurai reiterated on some of the issues raised during the meeting, and stressed that no person should be denied food security. He encouraged parliamentarians to take a more active role in advocating for food security and called for better development and enforcement of policies and legislation pertaining to food. Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit urged participants to take the implementation of the statement of commitment seriously and to ensure its goals are carried out.



Thailand L. to R: Mr. Torphong Chaiyasan, MP - Sen. Dr. Chit Charoenparasert - Sen. Dr. Nirun Pitawatchara



Vietnam L. to R: Hon. Dang Nhu Loi, MP and Vice-Chair of VAPPD - Mr. Nguyen Hoang Mai, VAPPD Officer



L. to R: Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD India - Hon. Dr. Gunasagar Gounder, MP Fiji - Mr. Md. Nasirul Haque Sabu, MP Bangladesh



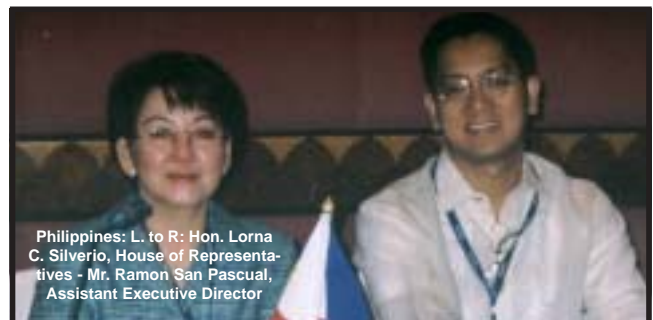
Malaysia L. to R: Hon. Chang See Ten, MP - Dato' Ms. Napsiah Binti Omar, MP and Treasurer of AFPPD - Datin Ramah Osman, Executive Director, AFPPD Malaysia



Japan L. to R: Mr. Eikou Kaneda, MP - Mr. Shin Sakurai, MP - Mr. Toshikatsu Matsuoka, MP - Mr. Takeaki Kashimura, MP - Mr. Kazuyasu Shiina, MP



Indonesia L. to R: Mr. Iping Somantri, SH, MP - Dr. Muhammad Askin H., S.H., MP - Mrs. Dwi Ria Latifa, SH, MP



Philippines: L. to R: Hon. Lorna C. Silverio, House of Representatives - Mr. Ramon San Pascual, Assistant Executive Director

Uganda Study Tour for Danish MPs

9th of January 2003 - Danish parliamentarians, with the support of the Danish FPA 'Sex og Samfund,' embarked on a week-long study tour of Uganda, one of Denmark's top priority countries. The purpose of the tour is to raise awareness among developed nations, NGOs and governments on sexual and reproductive health needs in developing countries. The Danish MPs visited projects in the Kapchorwa district aiming to eradicate the practice of FGM in the and engaged in open discussions with Ugandan parliamentarians on the possibility of reforming Uganda's restrictive abortion law. IEPFPD and FAPPD facilitated the visit.



New Parliamentary Committee Launched in Rwanda

The Network of Rwandan Parliamentarians on Population and Development was launched on 31 January 2003 at the National Assembly of Rwanda in Kigali by the Hon. Speaker of the Assembly, Dr. Vincent Buruta. The ceremony was marked by statements from Hon. Higiro Prosper (Vice President of the National Assembly of Rwanda, who is also the Coordinator of the Parliamentary and Development; Salifu, MP, President and Arab Population and (FAAPPD), and Mr. Representative in



L. to R: Hon. Alhaji Abdullah Salifu, President of FAAPPD - Hon. Dr. Higiro Prosper, Vice-Speaker and Coordinator of the Network - H.E. Dr. Vincent Buruta, Speaker of Rwandan Parliament - Member of Rwandan Parliament - Mr. Dirk Jena, UNFPA, Representative to Rwanda

Cabinet Ministers, the National Population number of the Community, and representatives were launch ceremony. Also five-member Kenyan Parliament Nyagah, MP, the Burundi Parliamentary Population and Development, the FAAPPD Executive Director, Mr. Joseph Atiku, and a Consultant for the Rwandan Network of Parliamentarians on Population and Development.

newly established Network on Population Hon. Al Haji Abdullah of the Forum of African Parliamentarians on Development Dirk Jena, UNFPA Rwanda.

Director of the Office Rwanda, a large parliamentarians, Diplomatic NGOs and civil society all present at the in attendance was a delegation from the led by Hon. Norman Chairperson of the Committee on

The Rwandan Network is to be coordinated by a five-member Executive Committee and has three persons specially appointed to follow-up implementation of the Network's decisions.

The Network has adopted a Constitution governing its operations, established a Plan of Action for the years 2003 – 2006, and set up a permanent Secretariat. The immediate task the Network intends to embark upon is the organisation of a series of meetings in order to make its existence, mission statement, activities and programmes better known in Rwanda.

The Rwandan Network of Parliamentarians on Population and Development is promoted by UNFPA under its Fifth Country Programme Cycle for the period 2002 – 2006. However, the magnitude of Rwanda's population and development situation warrants massive multi-bilateral financial assistance beyond that approved by UNFPA.

The preliminary results of the recent population and housing census of Rwanda, conducted in year 2000, gives a total population of 8.2 million with a population density of 311 persons per Km² – one of the most densely populated African countries. 66 % of the population are below 24 years old, the infant mortality rate is 124 per 1,000 live births and 34 % of married women who responded to the Demographic and Household survey 2000 indicated that they did not want any more children - only 4% of them use modern contraceptives.

About 13.7 % of the population, aged 15 – 49 are infected with HIV/AIDS.

The 2002 State of the World Population Report recently released by UNFPA shows that the average life expectancy of Rwanda for both sexes is 40.9 years. Gender based violence and inequality are widespread at both the community and household levels, despite the passing of laws prohibiting discrimination against women. The newly launched Parliamentary Network of Population and Development has therefore much work to do and is determined to fight against discrimination and contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of the Rwandan population.

AFPPD in PNoWB's HIV/AIDS Committee

At the Third Annual Conference of the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank, (PnoWB), in 2002, one hundred parliamentarians from more than fifty countries agreed that the number one priority in the year to come was to strongly advocate their governments to move from discussion to action. HIV/AIDS was identified as a priority area in poverty reduction due to the increasing numbers of infections in the world's poorest countries. South African MP, Ms. Ruth Bhengu, made a move for the creation of a working group within the PnoWB. The working group held its first introductory meeting on the 4th of December 2002 in commemoration of World AIDS Campaign but also to articulate focus and objectives. The voluntary participants of the working group are comprised from Ireland, India, Thailand, the Netherlands, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and the Asian and Inter-European parliamentary forums on population and development, (AFPPD and IEPFPD). Follow-up to the initial meeting includes the distribution of a questionnaire and the articulation of an action plan.



IAPPD Activities Praised

Indian Association Expanding Its Activities

In a recent message to the IAPPD, Mr. K.C. Pant, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of India commended the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development. He said "I am glad to learn that the IAPPD has widened the scope of its activities to cover all tiers of people's representatives from members of parliament to members of the village panchayats. It goes without saying that the elected representatives of the people can play a very major role in addressing the complex issues involved in achieving population stabilisation. The wider participation of the community in the formulation and implementation of programmes can ensure that the needs of the people are attended to.

Involvement of the people's representatives in all developmental activities including provision of health and family welfare services could improve things dramatically. In this regard, the 'block-level' workshops organised by IAPPD in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan intended to sensitise elected representatives on population concerns is an initiative which can be replicated elsewhere."

Mr. J.V.R. Prasada Rao, Secretary, Department of Family Welfare, Government of India, also delivered a similar message to the IAPPD.

4th Edition of 'Guide to European Population Assistance Now Available

The fourth edition of the 'Guide to European Population Assistance,' giving access to funding from all major European budget lines in the field of sustainable development, has now been published. The guide is a reference for development organisations and provides an overview of available public funding from fifteen European countries and the European community. The guide focuses on sustainable development and specifically on sexual and reproductive health, family planning, HIV/AIDS, and population. To view a sample of the kind of information contained in the guide online, visit the following webpage: <http://www.euroresources.org/sample.htm>

The History of the Asian Forum

A book by Mr. Jyoti Singh
former Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA and
President of Population 2005

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Philippines to Give Pills and Condoms to Couples Who Want Them

Despite pressure from the prominent Roman Catholic Church, the Philippine Government is to revive its family planning programme by giving artificial contraceptives to couples who want them. The Commission on Population said it would deploy local health workers to inform people of the health consequences of large families – both for the children and their mothers. "We respect the decision of catholic couples who choose natural methods to plan their families," the Commission said in a statement, noting the Church's ban on the use of artificial birth control such as contraceptives.

"For couples who want otherwise, the government will provide all medically safe and socially and legally acceptable forms of family planning."

President Gloria Arroyo, a staunch catholic, announced this month her government would launch a new family planning campaign emphasizing 'responsible parenthood, respect for life, birth-spacing, and informed choice.'

Indonesian Family Planner Warns of 400 Million Population by 2053

Indonesia's family planning board has warned that the population could double over the next fifty years to more than 400 million people if the government's 'Contraceptives for the Poor' programme is neglected.

National Family Planning Board (BKKBN) Chairwoman Yaumil Achir warned that widespread poverty and budget constraints were undermining the government's previous success in curbing population growth in Indonesia, which already ranks as the world's fourth most populous country with an estimated 215 million people.

The Indonesian Government has allocated a budget of 120 billion rupiah, (13.3 million dollars), this year to provide poor couples with contraceptives, but Mrs. Achir said that BKKBN needed at least 223 billion rupiah, (24.8 million dollars), per year to meet the needs of the poor.

Indonesia's FP programme has succeeded in reducing the annual population growth from more than 2 per cent per year prior to 1990 to 1.47 per cent.

Parliamentary Working Groups Come Together in Brussels

The IEPFPD held its first meeting for all persons and organisations providing secretariat services to all-party parliamentary groups across Europe. On January the 17th in Brussels, Secretariats from fourteen European parliamentary groups on population and development, as well as six additional NGOs working with parliamentarians in Europe, attended the meeting. The IEPFPD Secretariat gave a presentation on how it functions as an organisation and its work plan for 2003. Other parliamentary group secretariats gave accounts of their experiences in working with parliamentarians for resource mobilisation, creating an enabling environment, raising awareness by conducting study tours to developing countries, and the role of parliamentarians at the United Nations.



Interview

with **Mr. Wahidi Ramezan**
MP Iran



Mr. Wahidi Raemzan, MP Iran, is the Director of the Iranian Population and Development Management Committee. Greatly concerned with population issues not only in Iran, but the world over, Mr. Ramezan agreed to participate in an interview conducted by AFPPD's Editorial Associate, Ms. Mikaella Lock. In this interview, which took place shortly after AFPPD's Asian Parliamentarians' Meeting on ICPD Implementation in Bangkok, December 2002, Mr. Ramezan touches on some thorny issues and makes some very relevant points and we are certain that our readers will find this interview to be very useful and informative.

1 What do you think about population and RH programmes in Iran?

In Iran, population and RH programmes are carried out by the Ministry of Health. Last year the budget for population control was raised by about 100%. In relation to reproductive health and according to the ICPD PoA *'the right rests on recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have information and the means to do so.'* Considering the meaning of the above, we have to clarify

for society the future of civilisation if the consequences of population growth and depletion of the Earth's finite resources are not considered. This is a moral duty at the moment.

When we have gained sufficient wisdom, we will see ourselves as part of a total evolutionary process, and only then will we discover how to develop and interact

in the harmonised cycle of nature. Theoretically, this would then become 'law,' and those who chose to disobey the law would be forced by society to conform. As per our knowledge and resources, we will try to adopt the above concept in our Parliament and, therefore, I call upon parliamentarians from around the world to work together towards this aim.

I also call upon my colleagues in Iran, those who are willing to work on population and development issues, to join a new group organised by me and of which I am director. Currently, thirty highly educated and experienced MPs have been registered for this group, which plans to follow the ICPD PoA and try to fulfil its goals.

The Speaker of our Parliament has nominated one of our parliament headquarter members as his representative for this group to emphasise his support, and many new requests for registration within this group have been received.

2. What Can Mankind Achieve Through Population Planning?

Having fewer children will increase family assets and as families represent the smallest units of society, this will effectively increase society's assets. As a result, society's expenses will decrease as will its usage of finite resources, and this will enable us to guide society towards the utilisation of renewable resources. The potential benefits population planning could reap include; cessation of desertification caused by settlements; families' economic situations will improve thus allowing them to educate their children this, in turn, paves the way for a more enlightened and knowledgeable society; deforestation will decrease as will soil erosion, both

of which result from extensive food and energy needs of the growing population; and we will be able to more effectively control water pollution. These are just a few examples.

3. How Can We Implement Population Planning?

Well, first and foremost by encouraging families to have fewer children, but in order to achieve this, we must take many steps. I think, however, initial steps should focus on providing couples and those contemplating marriage with enough information on the consequences of population growth, and financial, social and governmental support be provided to those who partake in this process and agree to have a minimal number of children.

4. What Kind of Relationship Exists Between Population And The Biosphere?

We are the most influential creatures on this planet and our mental capacities have enabled us to harness and use every other living creature for our benefit. Using this power in an unwise manner undermines the lives of all living creatures and irreparably damages natural resources essential for the evolutionary process. Science, I believe, is the only way forward if we are to solve mankind's problems.

5. Do You Think Sustainable Development Is Possible Without Population Planning?

Absolutely not. By law of nature, if a creature increases its number unchecked, other resources related to its needs will diminish. We have enough wisdom to realise this and we should not shy away from that fact.

6. In Some Countries, Certain Leaders Believe Population Increase Brings Security. What Do You Think Of This?

In Iran we have a proverb: 'One wise man is better than one hundred unwise men.' The concept of population increase enhancing a country's security is, in my opinion, a fundamentalist ideal with no scientific basis whatsoever. Population must be harmonised with the planet's resources – only in this way can evolution continue.

7. Do you think Iran's family planning programme could be improved?

During the last eighty years, the population of Iran has increased by 400%. Iran is a large country with variable climates and diverse family structures. Family migration and displacement is also common due to natural disasters such as drought or because of war, (Afghan and Iraqi refugees). Iranian Parliament is striving to ensure good living conditions for all families, but resources are lacking as a result of

"Society must acknowledge that more children is synonymous with more resources."



population growth. This is an international problem in developing countries.

If we can succeed in convincing couples to have one or a maximum of two children then family planning would be greatly facilitated. If the idea of raising smaller families were to be embraced by each couple, the results of this decision would undoubtedly lend greater support to each family's individual economic situation. For example, assets owned by a smaller family such as a house and personal belongings may remain in the family for use by the next generation. With minor alterations, these possessions can remain for the generation after that and thus the cycle repeats itself. Couples who have many children will have to take into account that costs for schooling, clothing transportation, accommodation, etc. will all increase and that family assets will be inadequate for the next generation. It is imperative for couples to have access to information on family planning otherwise they will remain unaware of the benefits of having fewer children. If, in a society, the number of children born is equal or less than those that die, statistics which governments may not find desirable, the society will, at least, not be subject to fragile, moral conditions.

Society must acknowledge that *'more children'* is synonymous with the need for *'more resources,'* and in order to provide for these children, we will have to utilise even more resources to meet new needs. The outcomes of continued extraction and transformation of our planet's finite resources can only be detrimental to not only the environment but to civilisation as a whole.

Fully aware of this fact, we shall endeavour to deliver enough information to society through the media. This will increase the general public's knowledge. However, in the future, it may be a good idea to consider offering *'economic opportunities'* to families agreeing to have no more than two children.

8. In Iranian schools do you have sex education?

Traditionally, sex education, a typically taboo issue in Iran, was taught in the home. Iranian schools do not have a sex education curriculum as in the western sense, but we do have a section in our education system that tries to convince young people to not engage in sexual activities until marriage and though which the benefits of remaining healthy and free of sexual diseases are explained to them.

On another note, the Ministry of Health together with the Ministry of Education are going to prepare a special book for teachers on teaching sex education, in accordance with Iran's religious beliefs, to young people.

Lastly, in health centres all over the country, sex education is provided to those who are due to marry as well as to newly weds.

9. Is the issue of HIV/AIDS addressed in school?

This issue is addressed in our schools and media. We have extensive scientific programmes conducted by our Ministry of Health - the results of which are made public via the media. HIV/AIDS is not as widely spread in Iran as in some other countries, and drug-users and sex workers are the main sources for the spread of this disease.

10. In Iran are there any family planning programmes for adolescents?

The Ministry of Education takes care of adolescents and runs educational programmes specifically for them. I believe, however, these programmes are not sufficient and our group should prepare special programmes allowing adolescents to enhance their knowledge on RH issues. We need to try and have this approved by the Iranian Parliament.

11. One of the thorns associated with sex education is that it promotes sex. How could Iran overcome this problem?

To prevent promotion of sex, I think two groups of scientists should be involved in the development of sex education programmes. Firstly, psychologists should analyse these programmes and work out the best methods to relay valuable and appropriate information to the target audience without glorifying sex. These methods should then be taught to schoolteachers through methodical books. Secondly, biologists and biochemists should be involved as they can scientifically explain 'the facts of life' and help adolescents understand the natural sexual feelings they will experience as a result of biological changes in the body. I do not believe informing adolescents of the natural, biological changes they will experience promotes sex.

" I do not believe informing adolescents of the natural, biological changes they will experience promotes sex"

Young people must also be made aware of sexual diseases and what the consequences are if one were to contract an STD. I think providing information and generating awareness of STDs among adolescents would actually work as a disincentive for sexual activity.

12. Do you see any scope for further improvement of the sex education programme?

Yes. Once we can overcome our sensitivity and see things from a scientific perspective, I firmly believe many issues can be resolved.

13. Concerning HIV/AIDS, do you or any other members of your committee have any involvement in HIV/AIDS programmes?

As I have mentioned before, our group comprises highly educated members of parliament. We have health specialists who with the assistance of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and various NGOs, study, prepare, and transmit vital information relative to HIV/AIDS to the public through the mass media.

14. What type of services are available for people who are HIV/AIDS infected in Iran?

Some hospitals in Iran have divisions specifically for HIV infected persons. However, it is primarily the Ministry of Health's responsibility to assist those affected with HIV/AIDS and, indeed, other diseases. They provide drugs free of charge to infected individuals and their budget is mostly approved by Parliament. The private sector also assists the Ministry of Health through monetary donations, but unfortunately private help is inadequate.



In an effort to dispel the stigma that surrounds those infected with HIV/AIDS, the public is encouraged to be more accepting towards them and to direct them to the Ministry of Health where they can receive care and treatment.

15. Do you think Iranian parliamentarians focus enough on EVAW?

"We should respect women and their rights and not allow half the power of society to remain dormant and untapped"

I would be inclined to say yes. Strong laws are in place to protect women from violence. Our parliamentarians, particularly women parliamentarians, are very active in the drafting of laws to protect women against gender inequality. It will, however, take time to reach the point where men and women can share the same rights as equals, not just in Iran, but globally.

16. What is the ratio of female parliamentarians to male parliamentarians?

There are two hundred and ninety MPs in Iran, thirteen of which are women. This is equivalent to 4.5 percent. These women parliamentarians are very dedicated to women's issues and have established good rules for women, most of which have fortunately been approved by Parliament. Of the seven members of Iran's Population and Development Managing Committee two are women.

17. Do you think there should be more female parliamentarians?

Absolutely. I believe women are more sincere than men when it comes to population and development issues. From another aspect and thinking democratically, women represent half of the population, so it is logical they should hold half the seats in Parliament. In ancient times, the strength of a person was measured by muscle mass, automatically putting women at the wrong end of the stick so to speak. Following industrialisation, the mind's strength substituted physical strength. We should, therefore, respect women and their rights, and not allow half the power of society to remain dormant and untapped. Unfortunately, millions of women around the globe are still not aware of or allowed to exercise their rights. This must change and I urge all male parliamentarians to respect women and to work for their rights.

18. Which factors would you say have a negative impact on population and development programmes in Iran?

Lack of information. If adequate information on population and development were provided to any nation, there would be no negative impacts. How can any society change if it is not made aware of what is going on?

19. What type of programmes do you have for elderly people in Iran?

Traditionally, the elderly are cared for by their families in Iran though an appropriate budget to increase resources for their comfort is under consideration. Of course if we can maintain population growth in such a manner as to ensure society's input and output figures are equal, then we will have greater resources available for improving the life of elderly people.

20. What are your personal views on the types of programmes AFPPD could conduct in order to increase motivation on population and development issues among parliamentarians?

AFPPD should organise a group of co-workers to mail innovative programmes and models on population control to every eager parliamentarian. AFPPD could also find resources for the parliamentarians or NGOs who work on such models. Facts on all issues related to population and development should be updated on a regular basis and forwarded to parliamentarians, encouraging them to take a deeper interest in these issues and consequently work towards the implementation of improved policies and better enforcement of existing ones. Parliamentarians must be reminded of the duty they have towards their people. All knowledge is valuable, and if information is readily available, parliamentarians will be more inclined to take firm and decisive steps towards ICPD PoA implementation.

"One wise man is better than one hundred unwise men"
Iranian Proverb

Forum on Impact of AIDS on Socio-Economic Development

Malaysia - Almost three hundred participants including Members of State Assembly of Sarawak, various NGO representatives, and university and



L. to R: Hon. Dato. Napsiah Binti Omar, Treasurer AFPPD - Hon. Dr. Soon Choon Teck - Ms. Angeline Ackermans, UNAIDS Malaysia - Hon. Senator Datuk Abdul Karim Ghani, AFPPD Malaysia Committee Member



Hon. Datin Paduka Hajjah Rohani bt. Abdul Karim, Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Rural Development



Students attending the forum

college students, attended the forum on the 'Impact of HIV/AIDS on Socio-Economic Development,' which was declared open by the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Soon Choon Teck. This one-day forum, which took place in Sarawak, Malaysia, was organised by AFPPD Malaysia and held on the 12th of January, 2003. The meeting was closed by the Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Rural Development, Hon. Datin Paduka Hajjah Rohani bt. Abdul Karim.



Experience Sharing between Thai and Cambodian Women Parliamentarians

On the 24th of February 2003, a conference dedicated to sharing experiences with Cambodian women parliamentarians on the passage of the Domestic Violence Bill, (DVB), was held at the Parliament House, Bangkok, Thailand. It was hosted by the Thai



Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary General of AFPPD

Women Parliamentarians' Club, the National Council of Women, (Thailand), with support from the United Nations Development Fund for Women, (UNIFEM). The half-day conference was attended by approximately eighty participants ranging from Thai women parliamentary club committee members, other parliamentarians and their advisors, ambassadors, development cooperation agencies, UN agencies, and international and local NGOs based in Thailand.

The main objective of the meeting was to share Cambodia's experiences with participants in drafting, advocating and lobbying for the Domestic Violence Bill as well as to establish a regional network among Thai and Cambodian women parliamentarians and organisations for the eradication of all forms of violence against women. The Club, gradually expanding its work to neighbouring countries and NGOs, is working hard to strengthen future collaborations.

The welcome address was delivered by Ms. Nipa Pringsulaka, MP and Chairwoman of the Thai Women Parliamentarians' Club, which was followed by a speech by Ms. Rosa Linda Miranda, the Regional Director of UNIFEM. Hon. Mr. Pichet Pattanachote, First Vice-President of the Thai Senate, presided over the opening of the meeting.

The first session focused on providing background information to participants on the founding of the Thai Women Parliamentarians' Club, a platform for fighting violence against women. The session was chaired by Dr. Pudsadee Tamthai, MP and one of the main founding members of the Club.

Session two was devoted to Cambodia's experiences with the passing of the Domestic Violence Bill, which aims to prevent domestic violence and assist victims by enforcing protection orders with the help of governmental and non-organisations,



H.E. Ms. Mu Sochua, (centre with the green dress)

governmental authorities, courts, social organisations, etc.). A presentation was given by H.E. Ms. Mu Sochua, Minister of Women's Affairs and Veteran's Affairs, Government of Cambodia, who had worked tirelessly for the passing of this Bill.

Sen. Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary General of AFPPD, and Chair of the Advisory Board of the Thai Senate Committee, presided over the closing ceremony and presented a plaque of recognition to H.E. Ms. Mu Sochua for her efforts in the area of domestic violence.

New Head for WHO

Geneva – A tuberculosis expert from South Korea was elected on Tuesday, January the 28th, to head the World Health Organisation, (WHO).



Mr. Jong-Wook Lee, elected to head the WHO

Mr. Lee, who leads the World Health Organisation's 'Stop TB' programme, was elected by WHO's executive committee.

Mr. Lee gained the reputation as an efficient administrator during nineteen years of climbing through the ranks of WHO. Initially regarded as a political lightweight, he was said to enjoy solid Asian support – including from North Korea, which holds a seat on the executive

board. AFPPD and IMPO wish to convey their felicitations to Mr. Lee.

Cartoon Corner



Credit: Rachid Ait-Kaci



AFPPD Calender of Events for 2003

3 – 5 April	Inter-Country Parliamentarian Workshop on HIV/AIDS with a focus on vaccines in cooperation with the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, (IAVI) - Bangkok, Thailand
27 – 28 April	Asia-Pacific Parliamentarian seminar - Ho-Chi Minh City, Vietnam
27 April	The 51 st Executive Committee meeting of AFPPD - Ho-Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Dates to be finalised	International Medical Parliamentarians Conference on Family Health - Bangkok, Thailand
Dates to be finalised	Asian Women's Parliamentarian Conference on the Empowerment of Women in Parliament – Manila, the Philippines
Dates to be finalised	AFPPD Standing Committee Meeting on Women – Manila, the Philippines
Dates to be finalised	Central Asian Parliamentarians Meeting on Food Security, Water and Population – Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Dates to be finalised	Three Countries' Parliamentarian Consultation on Parliamentarian Advocacy for HIV/AIDS – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Dates to be finalised	Japanese Parliamentarians Visit to South Africa to observe RH and HIV/AIDS-related projects, organised by APDA, AFPPD, and FAAPPD
Dates to be finalised	Training course on advocacy for parliamentary committees' staff
Other related events	
8 – 10 March	Parliamentarians Network Conference of World Bank – Athens, Greece
19 – 21 May	Asia-Pacific Alliance on ICPD – Ottawa, Canada
Dates to be announced	Asia-Pacific Parliamentarian Conference on Environment – Mexico
6 – 10 October	2 nd Asia-Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health: AFPPD will organise a parliamentarians parallel session on RH and sexual health rights – Bangkok, Thailand

US Congress Calls on Bush to Withdraw Global Gag Rule Idea for HIV/AIDS Funding

On February the 28th, twenty members of US Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell calling on the Bush Administration to abandon plans to extend the so-called Mexico City Policy, which prevents US funds from going to any international group linked with abortion services, to Bush's AIDS initiative. The letter states that if the administration were to apply the policy to Bush's new international AIDS initiative, it would be a 'very grave and costly mistake.' It goes on to say, 'such a policy will not only contrast sharply with existing international practices, but will also make authorisation of a comprehensive global AIDS bill in Congress a difficult proposition and will further complicate the consideration of the fiscal year 2004 Foreign Operations bill – thus delaying the rapid disbursement of these much needed funds.'

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