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Quarterly Newsletter

The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development

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Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Populations During Emergencies

*A Message for World Population Day
Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi*

Today, July 11, is World Population Day. And this year's theme is Vulnerable Populations in Emergencies.

The Asia-Pacific region has experienced a variety of serious emergencies ranging from human conflicts to natural disasters to infectious disease outbreaks. Millions of people are affected and displaced by such crises, including some 3.5 million refugees, 1.9 million internally displaced people and 1.4 million stateless people today. The sad fact is that our region is especially prone to natural disasters. More than half of the world's 226 major natural disasters last year occurred in Asia and the Pacific region. Earlier this year, a devastating earthquake hit Nepal and neighbouring countries, taking more than 8,700 lives in Nepal only and leaving an estimated half-million people displaced from their homes. The plight of Rohingya asylum seekers has focused our attention on an increasingly critical regional humanitarian challenge. Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) has spread to our region, most severely affecting South Korea.

Responding to such emergencies, especially meeting the needs of our most vulnerable populations, requires political will and preparedness as well as health governance at the community, national, regional and global levels.

The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) stands with affected countries in the region and the international community, and works to make humanitarian support and emergency action more responsive and effective, especially for women, children and aging populations. Our member National Committees and parliamentarians can strengthen and complement international humanitarian efforts through our policy advocacy on emergency responses and preparedness, as well as governance in the health sector. Through legislation, budget allocation and oversight at the national level, as well as through regional



Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi, AFPPD Chairperson.

coordination to strengthen emergency preparedness for trans-boundary challenges, we, parliamentarians must ensure that the most vulnerable populations receive timely life-saving support and health care. Their needs should be met, and their rights should be protected, especially in emergencies.

Even as we negotiate the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), encompassing a new universal set of 17 goals and 169 associated targets, emergency situations never cease to arise. A new major emergency may arise anytime and anywhere. UN Member States are undertaking solemn new political commitments to properly frame their country's agendas and policies over the next 15 years. In so doing, we must not forget that serious gaps remain in meeting the needs outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD PoA). Assistance to vulnerable populations in emergencies is one example. We need to intensify our efforts and commitment to ensuring dignity and human rights for all, addressing gender-based issues in emergency situations, and providing universal access to health, sexual and reproductive health services and education.

Asia and the Pacific will continue to see emergency situations. We can and must mitigate their negative impact on vulnerable populations. AFPPD will continue to work with Asia-Pacific parliamentarians and national parliamentary committees to uphold human rights for all, and ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for people all ages.

April

Tens of Thousands of Pregnant Women Affected by Nepal Quake

Media grab from UNFPA, 27 April 2015

UNITED NATIONS, New York – The toll of deaths and injuries continues to mount days after a devastating 7.8-magnitude earthquake jolted Nepal on 25 April. Millions are thought to be affected across more than 30 of Nepal's 75 districts, according to reports by UN agencies. UNFPA's initial estimates indicate some 50,000 pregnant women and girls could be among the survivors.

The Government has reported more than 3,400 deaths so far, according to recent media reports. Thousands more are injured, many seriously, although as more information becomes available from remote, mountainous areas, the final tally could escalate further.

The situation remains precarious, with severe aftershocks continuing to rock the area – including a 6.7-magnitude tremor on 26 April.

Hospitals in the Kathmandu Valley are reported to be overcrowded, and hospital emergency stocks are being quickly depleted. Injured people are being treated in the streets, and many people are sleeping out in the open, too fearful to return indoors.

Women and girls especially vulnerable
Pregnant women affected by the disaster



A mother tends to a child injured in the 7.8-magnitude earthquake in Nepal. UNFPA's initial estimates indicate over 50,000 pregnant women and girls could be affected. © UNICEF/NYHQ2015-1013/Nybo

require maternal health services, including antenatal care, safe delivery services, post-partum care, and, for those who experience complications, emergency obstetric services. Protections for women and girls from gender-based violence and other threats will also be critical.

"In times of upheaval or natural disasters,

pregnancy-related deaths and gender-based violence soar," said Priya Marwah, UNFPA's humanitarian response coordinator in Asia and the Pacific. "Many women lose access to essential reproductive health services and give birth in appalling conditions without access to safe delivery services and lifesaving care."

Responding to urgent needs
UNFPA is coordinating with the Government and humanitarian partners to respond to these needs. Emergency staff members are being deployed, and dignity kits and reproductive health kits are en route to Nepal.

"The Fund is particularly concerned about the fate of pregnant women who have been affected by this tragedy, including those who might face potentially life-threatening complications," said UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, in a statement on the disaster. "All efforts will be exerted to support their safety and the safety of their babies."

Damage and fatalities stemming from the earthquake have also been recorded in neighboring India, China and Bangladesh.



Aftermath of the 7.8-magnitude earthquake in Nepal. © Krish Dulal/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0

May

Towards Better Sexual and Reproductive Health Outcomes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Promoting Health and Rights, Reducing Inequalities

"Girls are too young to get access to SRH information, but old enough to get married. This is unacceptable. We have to address the problem from human rights perspective," said Kate Gilmore, United Nations Population

Fund (UNFPA) Deputy Executive Director, during her keynote speech at the first day of the Regional Conference Promoting Health and Rights, Reducing Inequalities: Towards Better Sexual and Reproductive Health Outcomes in Eastern Europe and

Central Asia, which was organized by the Government of Bulgaria and UNFPA. The meeting gathered over 140 participants composed of ministers, parliamentarians, high-level officials and experts on sexual and reproductive health from Eastern Europe and

Central Asia in Sophia, Bulgaria on May 27-29, 2015. Discussion on investing in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) as part of efforts to address health inequalities and contribute to Sustainable Development Goals was the focus of the meeting. Integrated SRH services in the context of universal health coverage, health promotion and disease prevention will pave the road to healthy lifestyle and well-being.

The Central Asian region was represented by parliamentarians Hon. Irina Aronova from Kazakhstan, Hon. Nadira Narmatova from Kyrgyzstan and Hon. Hilolbi Qurbonzoda from Tajikistan, who are all active partners of AFPPD.

The meeting also discussed the need for proactive actions to address SRH challenges in the region. The need for SRH education for young people was highly recognized. "In most of the countries in the region, young people are getting too little information and too late. Teachers are not ready to provide SRH education and need special training." The case of Estonia was cited as an example: Estonia was successful in drastically reducing HIV infection and abortion rate among young people due to compulsory sexuality education starting from secondary school and a country-wide youth clinic network.

Prior to the conference a Regional Parliamentary Consultation was held on 26 May. The consultation brought together 10 Members of Parliament and experts from the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. Parliamentarians discussed the enhancement of legal frameworks to ensure rights-based and human-centered policies and remove economic, financial and social barriers to full realization of the ICPD Programme of Action in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. Young activists from youth organizations in the region joined the parliamentarians in the last session and shared their opinions, experiences and aspirations.

Kyrgyz Parliament Adopts Bill on Reproductive Rights



Hon. Nadira Narmatova, Vice-Speaker of Parliament of Kyrgyzstan



Hon. Damira Niyazalieva, Vice-Prime-Minister of Kyrgyzstan

The Bill on Reproductive Rights in Kyrgyzstan is now a law. The legislation was adopted during its third readings on May 22 at the Jogorku Kenesh Parliament of Kyrgyz Republic. The law aims to provide and guarantee Kyrgyz citizens' access to sexual and reproductive health education and services. The legislation will be implemented soon after the President signs up for its enactment. The authors and proponents of the law included former MP and current Vice Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Hon. Damira Niyazalieva and Vice Speaker of Parliament Hon. Nadira Narmatova, who are both active members of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD).

"This law will benefit the Kyrgyz youth, the mothers and fathers and the government of Kyrgyzstan," says Hon. Niyazalieva. The law was six years in the making. The bill was met with oppositions questioning the merit and need for such legislation. Proponents strongly argued that sexual and reproductive rights is an integral part of human rights and that providing access to education and services will positively impact on the lives of Kyrgyz

citizens. The adoption of the bill addresses the issues of the right to equality and freedom from all forms of discrimination, including the right of citizens to education and information, which will ensure that any decision relating to their sexual and reproductive lives will be based on a full, free and informed consent.

Hon. Narmatova, during her participation at UNFPA-AFPPD National Committees planning session last January in Bangkok, Thailand, commented that AFPPD and UNFPA Country Office in Kyrgyzstan provided valuable support in the reproductive rights advocacy in her country. Over the past three years, AFPPD organized conferences, consultations and parliamentary visits, and actively worked with local CSOs and UNFPA Kyrgyzstan Country Office to mobilize youth activists to support the bill. The well-publicized flashmob is an example of a joint effort of AFPPD, Kyrgyz members of the parliament and youth organization (Y-PEER Kyrgyzstan).

June

Ministers, MPs and Health Specialists from the Pacific Gathered to Discuss Male Involvement in SRHR Initiatives



UNFPA Pacific Director and Representative Dr. Laurent Zessler (left), NZDD member Hon. Kevin Hague. Photo from UNFPA Pacific Sub-Regional Office

New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development (NZPPD) hosted a Parliamentary Open Hearing on Engaging Boys and Men in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) initiatives in the Pacific,' on Monday 29 June in Wellington, New Zealand. Ministers and MPs from Tonga, Samoa, Kiribati, Tuvalu, PNG and New Zealand attended the Hearing.

The Director General of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Mr Tewodros Melesse, as well as the Director and Representative of UNFPA SROP Dr Laurent Zessler, were amongst several presenters who shared their experience and expertise on the topic. A report will be compiled with recommendations of how to improve the engagement of boys and men in SRHR initiatives in the Pacific.

NZDD is one of the national parliamentary committee members of AFPPD.

General Assembly Meeting of JPFP Welcomes IPPF Director-General Tewodros Melesse



Director-General Melesse, Hon. Sadakazu Tanigaki, Ms. Iemaima Lise Havea



Hon. Yasuo Fukuda, Director-General Melesse



Director-General Melesse, Hon. Keizo Takemi



Director-General Melesse, Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko

“Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP) will reach a historic milestone in the area of population and sustainable development after the adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda in September this year,” said JPFP Chair Hon. Sadakazu Tanigaki in his opening speech at the JPFP General Assembly in June 16 at Tokyo, Japan. He added that “JPFP will use this time as an occasion for generating momentum to resolving problems and to taking initiatives.”

Eminent advocates of population and development attended JPFP’s General Assembly. Director-General of Director-General of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Mr. Tewodros Melesse, who was warmly welcomed by JPFP, expressed his gratitude for the Japanese government’s, parliamentarians’ and the general public’s support to IPPF. He stated that “In course of promoting cooperation with the private sector, IPPF has concluded a comprehensive partnership agreement with Kansai Paint Co., Ltd. and specific projects had already been launched.” He added that

IPPF continues to campaign for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to be incorporated in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. “Unless efforts are made to deal with this problem, it will be impossible to find a solution for global issues like climate change.”

The Executive Director of JPFP and Chairperson of AFPPD Hon. Keizo Takemi announced that the first G7 Summit—after the adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda—will be held in Japan next year. “JPFP, as parliamentarians of the host nation, will hold the International Parliamentarians’ Conference where the important issues of population and development will be discussed,” said Hon. Takemi. He also called for the further strengthening of cooperation with IPPF, which has been supporting JPFP activities.

Ms. Iemaima Lise Havea, Head of Integrated SRHR Programmes, IPPF East and South Asia and Oceania Region (ESEAOR), gave a presentation on specific activities of IPPF member associations in the area. Hon. Yuriko Koike, Vice-Chair of JPFP, asked about the use of the information and communications

technology (ICT) in Oceania, which is prone to natural disasters. “While efforts are being made as cyclone warnings using mobile telephones, there are some issues concerning cost and sustainability. There is a need to consider cost reduction through cooperation with the private sector companies in the future,” answered Ms. Havea.

Director-General Melesse paid courtesy visits to Hon. Yasuo Fukuda, JPFP Honorary Chair; Hon. Sadakazu Tanigaki, JPFP Chair; Hon. Teruhiko Mashiko, JPFP Vice-Chair; Hon. Keizo Takemi, JPFP Executive Director and AFPPD Chair; Hon. Toshiko Abe, State Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and JPFP Deputy Executive Director; Hon. Aiko Shimajiri, JPFP Secretary-General; Hon. Ryuhei Kawada, JPFP Director; and Hon. Karen Makishima, Vice-Chair of the JPFP Gender Issues Committee.

JPFP is one of the national parliamentary committees of AFPPD. IPPF and AFPPD have been working together on population and development issues.

Strengthening Parliament's Capacity in Integrating Population Issues into Development (SPCPD)



Improving Maternal Health through Ensuring Safe Delivery Sub-committee Meeting was held on June 17, 2015. The meeting aims to generate a plan of actions to improve maternal health in Bangladesh. The meeting concluded with important decisions: to organize consultation meetings with the Standing Committees of Finance and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to increase budget; to send a letter with Convener's signature to all parliamentarians, district surgeons, deputy commissioners (DC), Upazila Nirbahi officers (UNO) and Officer-in-Charge (OC) requesting them to ensure regular discussions on maternal health and safe delivery in their

respective monthly coordination meetings and motivate people to ensure delivery at health centers; and to organize awareness building campaigns, meetings, consultation workshops, etc. at both national and local levels by involving all stakeholders including Parliamentarians. The meeting was chaired by member of parliament Hon. Mr. ASM Feroz, Chief Whip, Bangladesh Parliament and the Chair of the Sub-committee.

The meeting also produced a three-year advocacy plan. This plan includes three priority advocacy issues: improving maternal health through ensuring safe

delivery; eliminating child marriage; and ensuring young people's development. To strengthen the advocacy efforts, Bangladesh Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (BAPPD) has formed three sub-committees, one each for the three above-mentioned issues. Hon. Chief Whip ASM Feroz convened the sub-committee on improving of maternal health and ensuring safe delivery. Chair of Standing committee of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Ms. Rebeka Momin convened the sub-committee on eliminating child marriage; and Member of Parliament Ms. Sanjidha Khanam convened the sub-committee on Youth development.

AFPPD Executive Committee Appoints Interim Executive Director



Ms. Nobuko Horibe, Interim Executive Director

Ms. Nobuko Horibe was appointed Interim Executive Director by the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development's Executive Committee during its 77th Meeting Bangkok on May 4. The appointment is effective immediately until October 2015, to provide leadership, following the resignations of Mr. Ramon Pascal, former Executive Director in February and Mr. John Hyde, former Deputy Executive Director/ Acting Executive Director (since March) in April 2015.

Hon. Prof. Keizo Takemi, Chair of AFPPD, on his announcement, pointed out that "Ms. Horibe brings with her a long experience and expertise in population and development to guide the AFPPD's work in the region during the transition period."

Prior to this appointment, Ms. Horibe was the Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for more than 6 years, and has worked with AFPPD closely. As the Regional Director, she provided overall direction and oversight of UNFPA activities in the region towards the achievement of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality and women empowerment and integration of population dynamics in development planning.

Ms. Horibe will work closely with the Executive Committee during the transition period until the General Assembly on October. "AFPPD, in the meantime, will proceed with the selection of the new Executive Director," said Hon. Prof. Takemi.