

RECORD RECOGNISE RESPECT

4th Asia and the Pacific Regional Conference on
UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION
13-17 MARCH 2006
REPORT



Participants explore country exhibits



Prof Li (China) makes a point during a parallel session



A participant from the Pacific Islands is introduced to the Malaysian 'MyKad' identification card



Karen S Bigay (Philippines) gives a plenary speech on the importance of involving youth



Birth registration poster



Jim Emerson (Plan) and Sawon Hong (UNICEF) with youngest participant Ben Takaki (3 months)

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Participants share ideas and experiences during country exhibits



Participants reflect on earlier achievements in setting 2006 country priorities

PROGRESS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

- **INDIA**
Through efforts to clear the backlog in birth certificate issuance, approximately 30 million birth certificates were issued during one year, the first phase of the national campaign initiated in 2003.
- **CHINA**
One billion people registered in the national registration database.
- **CAMBODIA**
Less than 5% of the population was registered.

2000	2001	2002	2003
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ VIETNAM The percentage of children registered was 72%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ MALAYSIA Introduction of 'MyKad' electronic ID card with online registration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ VIETNAM The percentage of children registered increased to 87%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ INDONESIA In Surakarta City, Central Java Province, 62% of the population was registered. ■ MYANMAR The vital registration system was launched and established in five states and divisions. ■ THAILAND The number of computerised registration offices was 505. ■ 3rd Asia and the Pacific Regional Conference on Universal Birth Registration. ■ MALAYSIA Introduction of 'MyKid' electronic ID card.

■ BANGLADESH

Parliament enacted the new Births and Deaths Registration Act 2004, which creates high demand for birth registration once it is fully implemented by the Government.

The Birth Registration Information System (BRIS) was upgraded and introduced in 15 Registrar Offices, including five in rural areas.

■ PHILIPPINES

In Agusan Norte Province on the island of Mindanao, birth registration coverage increased from 86% to almost 100% in 2005, through support from young volunteers, schools and Parent Teacher Community Associations, which helped to identify unregistered children.

■ PAKISTAN

In the four pilot districts of North West Frontier Province where manual birth registration is practised, the percentage of population registered increased from 11% to 70%. In two districts where computerised birth registration was introduced, the percentage of the population registered increased from 25% to 62% within one year.

■ PAPUA NEW GUINEA

A national campaign conducted in 2004-05 led to an increase from 3% to 25% of children registered and there was decentralisation to ten provinces.

■ CHINA

300 million more people added to the national registration database since 2003 to make 1.3 billion people recorded in database.

■ LAO PDR

A provision on birth registration is included in the draft children's law to be presented to the National Assembly for approval in 2006.

■ CAMBODIA

73% of the population was registered, as a result of a massive mobile registration and awareness raising campaign.

2004

■ THAILAND

Technical aspects of civil registration services improved, increasing the number of computerised registration offices to 2,073 by January 2004.

■ TIMOR LESTE

During 2003-04 an average of 25,584 births per year were registered.

2005

■ MYANMAR

In 2005, the vital registration system was in all 14 states and divisions, and all 325 townships. More than 6,000 basic health staff members have been trained in recording and reporting.

■ SRI LANKA

The National Study on the Status of Birth Registration in Sri Lanka confirms 94% birth registration in 2005. A national campaign using multimedia techniques was launched with the President's endorsement and blueprints for modernisation of the system were produced.

■ TIMOR LESTE

In 2005, 59,402 births were registered.

■ VIETNAM

The percentage of children registered increased up to 95%.

■ NEPAL

In spite of insurgency and destruction of infrastructure and records, 600,395 births were registered.

2006

■ INDONESIA

In Surakarta City 95% of the population was registered. This was a result of social mobilisation campaigns, building the civil registration and vital statistics system, and being free of charge.

■ 4th Asia and the Pacific Regional Conference on Universal Birth Registration. Participation by more countries in Asia (e.g., Bhutan and Mongolia) and the Pacific (Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu).

Grand Mercure Fortune Hotel
Bangkok, Thailand

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Introduction

The 4th Asia and the Pacific Regional Conference on Universal Birth Registration, organised by Plan and UNICEF, was held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 13-17 March 2006. Over 200 delegates from 22 countries – including civil registrars, youth advocates, government, local and international non-governmental organisations, Plan and UNICEF staff and the media – gathered around the agenda of achieving Universal Birth Registration in Asia and the Pacific. Over five days, starting with a pre-conference workshop for civil registrars, participants shared experiences and discussed a range of topics related to the four conference themes: legal reform, awareness-raising, disasters and emergencies, and systems.

The leadership of civil registrars as key members of country delegations particularly enriched discussions in plenary sessions, parallel sessions and country working groups. Youth advocates from participating countries shared their expertise and priorities, highlighting the importance of involving children and youth in all aspects of work for children's rights. The increased presence from countries in the Pacific region was particularly welcome.

Throughout the sessions, participants shared challenges and highlighted priorities as well as offered solutions and examples of good practices for effective birth registration. In addition, country delegations revisited the priorities set at the 3rd conference in 2003 and jointly took stock of progress made. This analysis formed the basis for setting goals and identifying priorities for the future.

Key outcomes of the conference were country priorities formulated by delegations and the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Civil Registrars Network to facilitate long-term cooperation and follow-up. Participants also made a conference statement, the initial draft of which was generated by the civil registrars in their workshop. The conference statement was taken forward, discussed, developed and refined during the course of the five days, with full delegate participation, sending a strong message on the importance of Universal Birth Registration for realisation of children's rights and development of society.

The 4th Asia and the Pacific Regional Conference on Universal Birth Registration was successful in meeting its objectives of promoting learning and sharing across a diverse region, measuring progress made, identifying priorities and renewing commitment from countries in the region to achieve Universal Birth Registration.

This publication includes the highlights of the conference proceedings and outcomes. The included CD (also available from Plan Asia Regional Office, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia) contains the full documentation from all the sessions at the conference.



Rima Salah (Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF), Bishal Rana (Youth Advocate, Nepal), Carmelita N Ericta (Civil Registrar General, Philippines) and Myrna Evora (Plan Asia Incoming Regional Director)

Why Universal Birth Registration?

Because many children are not registered. The right to a name and nationality is the right of every child, as stated in Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Therefore, every child or person, regardless of class or caste, race, status or living condition, and where they come from, must be registered and have a name and nationality.

Welcome by Maria Corazon Buala (Philippines) and Nirmal Kunari (India), Youth Advocates



Youth advocates

Background

Without a birth certificate, children are often unable to prove their age, nationality, or who their parents are. They risk being denied the rights and privileges a nation offers its citizens, such as legal protection and access to education and healthcare. Birth registration establishes the formal proof of a child's existence and provides the legal basis for claiming human rights. The right to be registered at birth is enshrined in Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

All governments in Asia and the Pacific have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, committing themselves to ensuring Universal Birth Registration.

Plan and UNICEF are committed to support governments in the region in achieving Universal Birth Registration. To provide opportunities for networking, learning and sharing of experiences among countries in Asia and the Pacific, Plan and UNICEF have jointly organised three regional events on birth registration:

- Asian Civil Registrars General Convention, November 1999 in Bangkok, Thailand
- Workshop on Practices for Improving Birth Registration, December 2000 in Surabaya, Indonesia
- Third Asia Regional Conference on Birth Registration – A Child's First Right, January 2003 in Bangkok, Thailand

As a result of their exchanges with and learning from fellow participants and resource persons, the 18 country delegations at the third conference formulated priorities for birth registration initiatives in their respective countries. At the end of the conference, regional and national level recommendations were made and five areas were recognised as appropriate for follow-up:

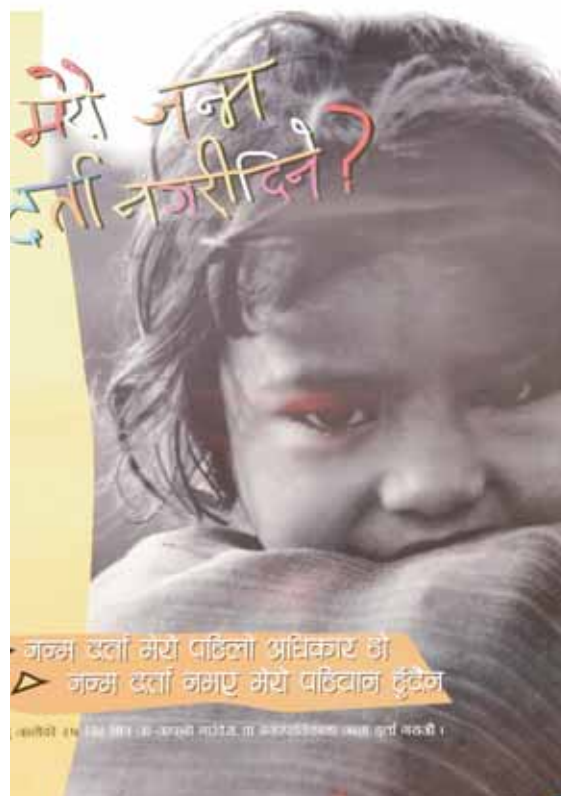
- Awareness building
- Capacity building
- Children's participation
- Legal reform, and
- Networking of civil registrars.

Work to be Done

Forty-eight million children go unregistered globally every year and 50% of the unregistered children are in Asia alone. An aggressive approach towards the issue of non-registration will prevent millions from falling out of the legal protection net. This includes:

- Elaborate system analysis and improvement
- Legal reforms
- Coverage of minorities
- Addressing the issue of statelessness
- Elaborate and effective public awareness strategies
- Advocacy for bringing about attitudinal change

Keynote on Progress in Asia and the Pacific by Shabir Ahmed, Senior Advisor, Governance and Child Rights, Plan Cambodia



Birth registration poster



Civil Registrars from Asia and the Pacific

Themes and Objectives

One of the recommendations from the third conference was that this fourth conference should focus on certain areas. **Legal reform** and **awareness-raising** at all levels of the importance of birth registration were highlighted as priority areas for further work.

The experiences of the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and ongoing armed conflicts in the region, also highlighted a need to consider issues of civil registration in the context of **disasters and emergencies**. Finally, as in previous conferences, there continued to be a focus on birth registration **systems**.

There was an opportunity in the conference for country and regional delegations to report on any progress made on the **country priorities** set at the 2003 conference and to share their experiences of other initiatives.

Therefore, the conference objectives were to:

- Identify challenges and gaps in legal frameworks and the implementation of existing laws, in particular inclusion of marginalized groups
- Promote legal reform of civil registration by sharing lessons learned and good practices from across the region, including from young people's organizations involved with advocacy
- Exchange good practices in raising awareness of the importance of birth registration
- Share experiences of civil registration issues in disaster situations (e.g., the Indian Ocean tsunami) and emergencies (e.g., armed conflicts) and identify preparedness measures
- Assess progress made and achievements to date in countries' birth registration systems and initiatives
- Review and revise priorities in birth registration initiatives suggested by country delegations at the January 2003 conference, and
- Strengthen networks (including civil registrars and others) across Asia and the Pacific



Birth registration poster

Reaching the Marginalised

In many countries, there are pockets of populations, groups and children, marginalised in society, where birth registration rates are low. The reasons are diverse and varied. It may be the result of:

- Conflict and unrest
- Belonging to a minority or indigenous group
- Living in a poor and remote area that is difficult to access
- Living in irregular urban settlements or slums far from their home community
- Being a refugee or migrant worker in a different country, or
- Being a child living without the care of parents or a guardian.

The numbers in these groups may be smaller in comparison to the total number of unregistered children, but the fact that they are already excluded and marginalised means the lack of a birth certificate puts them at even greater risk of discrimination, violence, abuse and exploitation.

The legal recognition and proof of identity that a birth certificate provides is vital to securing many rights and benefits, from recognition and protection under the law, to access to education, health and other social services ... For our efforts to be successful, current laws and regulations on birth registration must be reviewed to ensure any statements that could lead to discrimination and exclusion are removed. Birth registration systems must be inclusive, and information campaigns on birth registration must be designed to reach marginalised groups.

Increased commitment and realisation of the importance of birth registration as a tool to protect fundamental human rights among government decision- and policy-makers is needed to ensure that sufficient attention and resources are allocated towards achieving birth registration for all.

Opening Remarks by Jim Emerson, Chief Operating Officer, Plan International



Birth registration poster

Free Birth Registration

Our objective is clear – free birth registration and a free birth certificate for every child in every country.

Opening Remarks by Rima Salah, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

Sessions

During the conference, a range of topics within the four conference themes was presented and discussed in technical sessions, plenary and workshops. Plenary presentations introduced the key issues of each conference theme and served to establish the foundation for further small group discussions. In addition, 18 parallel sessions were held on specific areas, to stimulate sharing of experiences and effective practices among countries and participants. Below is a list of all the sessions at the conference. Full documentation of each session is included on the conference CD.

Plenary Sessions

- Legal Frameworks for Birth Registration
- Awareness-raising on Child Rights Issues by Children and Youth
- Birth Registration – Post Earthquake and Tsunami in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province

<i>Parallel Sessions</i>	<i>Themes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gender-based Discrimination in Universal Birth Registration ▪ Re-expatriation, Legal-Illegal Migration and Documenting the Halaws – The Philippine Experience ▪ Participation of Children and Youth in Advocacy for Universal Birth Registration and Other Child Rights Issues ▪ Linkages between Birth Registration and Statelessness 	<i>Legal Reform</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Readiness Assessment for Universal Birth Registration in Andhra Pradesh, India ▪ Exploring China's Birth Registration: Status, Determinants and Promotion Strategies ▪ Child Rights, Universal Birth Registration and the Media: How to Make Universal Birth Registration a News Story? ▪ Universal Birth Registration Awareness and Advocacy Campaign in Pakistan ▪ Awareness-raising and Action on Child Rights ▪ Public Awareness and Systems: Equilibrium between Need and Response – A Cambodia Case 	<i>Awareness-raising</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experience-sharing on Disasters, Emergencies and Birth Registration ▪ Registration in Disasters and Emergencies ▪ Birth Registration in Selected Tsunami Affected Countries and Strategies for Their Improvement in the East Asia and Pacific Region 	<i>Disasters and Emergencies</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Birth Registration System in Pakistan ▪ Birth Registration and Access to Education ▪ Computerisation of Registration in Malaysia ▪ Birth Registration Systems in Pacific Island Countries ▪ Birth Registration with Children in Need of Special Protection (CNSP) – The Philippine Experience 	<i>Systems</i>

Conference Statement

We met in Bangkok, Thailand from 13-17 March 2006 for the 4th Asia and the Pacific Regional Conference on Universal Birth Registration. We were representatives of government, non-government, international and youth-led organisations from 22 countries across the region and other parts of the world. Our discussions were also enhanced by the contributions of civil registrars from the participating countries.

At the conference, we acknowledged that there has been progress since the 3rd Regional Universal Birth Registration Conference in January 2003. Notable areas of progress at the national level include the enactment of birth registration laws and amendments to existing legislation, and innovations that have resulted in more effective systems and increased rates of birth registration. We acknowledge that there is now more access to birth registration in Asian and Pacific Island countries than there was three years ago.

We recognise the significance of birth registration as part of complete civil registration for the exercise of human rights, to generate reliable vital statistics and to contribute to good governance. Birth registration, in particular, is critical to the realization and protection of children's rights. We also acknowledge that challenges remain and that there is much work to be done to achieve our shared goal of Universal Birth Registration.

National legislation should enable all children born within any country to be registered and issued a birth certificate. We believe that birth registration should be universal, non-discriminatory, compulsory,

accessible and free of charge, and that first issuance of birth certificates should be without cost. We need to advocate with relevant government authorities to allocate adequate resources for effective birth registration. We acknowledge that political will, commitment and priority at the highest levels of government are needed for this to happen.

We need to work with children, youth, families, communities and civil society in all birth registration initiatives, especially on awareness-raising. We also need to raise awareness with policy-makers and implementers on the importance of birth registration.

We recognise that during disasters and emergencies, unregistered children are at greater risk of exploitation. Disasters and emergencies reveal the civil registration system's weaknesses and strengths. Laws should be introduced or amended to include provisions for disaster and emergency situations, including simplified civil registration procedures.

Birth registration systems must be streamlined and simplified, and other basic services such as health and education linked with them. No child, however, should ever be denied basic services or exercise of other rights due to not having a birth certificate. We now encourage governments to take advantage of information and communication technologies, while considering issues of privacy and confidentiality.



Participants in the Civil Registrars Workshop



Participants engage in group discussions on birth registration practice

Our message from the conference is:

- Record every child born – including the large numbers of children who remain unregistered everywhere
- Recognise that each and every child is a member of society from birth in their own right – with a name, parents, family and a nationality and the legal rights and benefits that arise from it
- Respect the rights of each individual child – to protect them from all forms of discrimination, violence, exploitation and abuse.

We are pleased that one of the outcomes of the 4th Asia and the Pacific Conference on Universal Birth Registration is a commitment to form a civil registrars network. The civil registrars participating in the conference resolved to reach Universal Birth Registration by 2015, thus contributing to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. They also look forward to continuing their partnership with Plan and UNICEF to achieve this. A second outcome of the conference is each country's priorities for taking Universal Birth Registration forward in the coming years.

We acknowledge that among other challenges before us, we still need to continue our national and regional dialogues on the linkages among birth registration, nationality and citizenship, so that our practices are in accordance with Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. No child should be left stateless.



Birth registration poster



Youth advocates

Examples of Effective Practice

Conference discussions enabled participants to share and learn about Universal Birth Registration work in the various country settings. The plenary and parallel sessions encouraged reflection on effective practice and highlighted lessons learnt from experiences in the field. Some examples of effective practice are outlined below:

Legal Reform

- Ensure non-discrimination based on gender in marriage and inheritance laws by assessing and amending such laws to consider gender equality. [Nepal]
- Minimise exclusion and stigmatisation of children born out of wedlock by allowing children born to register using the name of the father, regardless of the parents' marital status. [Philippines]
- Register all children regardless of the legal status of the child's parents. This can reduce the problem of statelessness in the country. [India]
- Increase the impact of lobbying efforts by involving children and youth organisations in campaigns on Universal Birth Registration. [Philippines]
- Generate media and public support on specific advocacy issues through the use of actual experiences and testimonies. [Philippines]
- Ensure that government intervention is immediate, there is mutual agreement between concerned governments and the documentation process is quick. [Philippines]
- Engage representatives from NGOs, government and other appropriate sectors to support national, regional and international meetings on children and youth issues. [Philippines]



Sapana Malla Pradhan (Nepal) presents ideas on gender-based discrimination in Universal Birth Registration

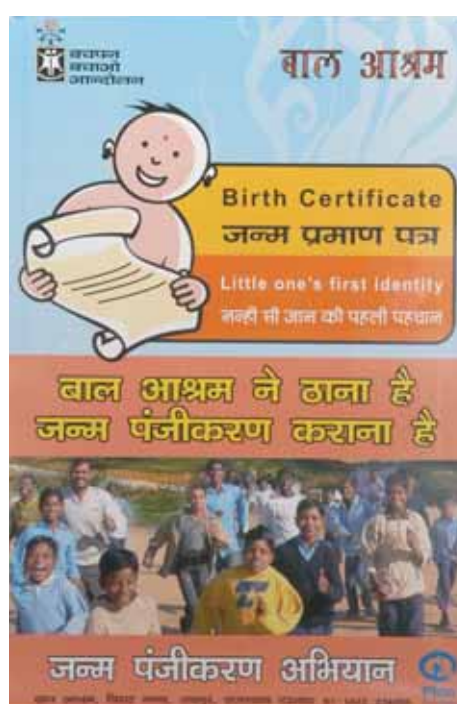
Registration and Human Rights

Good and efficient governing must be based on informed decisions, which is why it needs accurate vital statistics. Civil registration is, without doubt, the best source for accurate and reliable vital statistics. Efficient and legitimate governing at all levels requires civil registration for its legal implications – citizenship, for example. Ensuring basic human rights is crucial for the normal functioning and governing of societies worldwide. The exercise of many human rights depends directly on the existence of the functioning civil registration system.

Keynote on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in the World by Srdjan Mrkic, Chief, Demographic Statistics Section, United Nations Statistics Division

Awareness-raising

- Encourage a high percentage of deliveries in hospitals and health facilities (in Sri Lanka approximately 80%) and high level of literacy (94%) as these can contribute greatly to the success of birth registration. [Sri Lanka]
- Highlight government ownership of the birth registration campaign evidenced in the introduction of new laws to address birth registration issues and subsidisation of campaign electronic and print media. [Pakistan]
- Involve and gain the active support of the highest level of the political establishment such as the Head of State and First Lady as champions and advocates in campaigning for Universal Birth Registration. [Indonesia]
- Maintain an average of four articles per month on Universal Birth Registration in local and national media. Deploy UN volunteers for public awareness and sensitisation of local service providers. [Cambodia]



Birth registration poster

Disasters and Emergencies

- Implement mobile and outreach registration following disasters, such as the tsunami. [Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand] Two kinds of 'mobile' registration services which can improve reach include: an on-the-spot registration of births, marriages and deaths in affected areas and an extension of the registration office to locations to which people migrated. Registrars get information, verify it in the place of origin and issue or reissue the certificate within two weeks. An important pre-condition for mobile registration is trained village-level registrars paid an allowance only and commissions for each registration. [Sri Lanka]
- Include a birth registration component in central and local-level disaster and emergency preparedness planning. Availability, accessibility and management of that data after the disaster are keys to effective disaster management. The civil registration office needs to be given autonomy to act immediately. [Thailand]
- Include civil registration aspects in the disaster management plan. Pakistan's disaster management plan which was developed as a consequence of the earthquake experience can be shared with other countries. [Pakistan]
- Create a Disaster Management Authority. [India]
- Identify a single government agency to lead the management of data and coordination among agencies after a disaster. There should be a lead for each sector, e.g., WES is now led by UNICEF; Health is led by WHO; Protection can be led by UNICEF and UNHCR. This 'inter-agency cluster leadership' approach should improve coordination in future disasters. [Philippines]
- Establish a central database to enable more effective re-establishment of documents. A registration "back-up mechanism" (centralised database) allows people to retrieve a 'certificate' when all documents are lost and all local infrastructure and systems are destroyed. [Malaysia and Thailand]
- Implement a disaster decree (temporary) banning movement or transportation of children and adoption of orphans, as a necessary child protection measure. [Pakistan]
- Establish village-level committees to verify the identity of children who lost parents. [Nepal]
- Reduce the period of grace for death from seven years to six months after a disaster (such as the tsunami) and establish indicators to monitor how long it takes for people to gain certificates and for how long (possibly two years) the "special situation conditions" should be in place. [Sri Lanka]

Recovering from Disaster

The population and civil registration in Aceh is far from recovered, especially in the west coast of Aceh where the worst impact of the tsunami was felt. The causes are:

- The challenge to strengthen coordination between various institutions, both government and non-government, implementing reconstruction and rehabilitation, including coordination between local government and the special government institution set up for recovery.
- The infrastructure of civil registration has not yet recovered: civil registration offices have not all been rebuilt; registration books of birth certificates in civil registration offices have not been replaced; and related required papers and facilities to store the documents are still at a minimum.

Systems

- Establish a comprehensive system of registration, from rural registrar, to divisional, district, provincial, and finally the civil registrar general. Link the birth registration system to the health system through a mandatory reporting system. Births in hospitals or health facilities are reported to the concerned registrar by health personnel. In the case of home deliveries, the village head is responsible for reporting. To reach the pockets of disparity, mobile registration units are used. This system has generated birth registration coverage of 94%. [Sri Lanka]
- Develop a Birth Registration Information and Management System (BRIMS) with the Union Council as the sole authority for registration. This system became operational four years ago and has addressed the issue of “involvement of several channels” in birth registration. [Pakistan]
- Encourage government review of the present binary household registration policy (which is different for rural and urban areas and complicates the birth registration system) so that these two systems can become unified and more streamlined. [China]
- Issue birth certificates in both national language and English. [Pakistan]
- Delegate duties to schools, churches and health centres, with careful implementation. This could be an effective way to deal with dispersed populations. [Papua New Guinea]
- Develop support networks for children in need of special protection as these are becoming increasingly responsive to birth registration. [Philippines]
- Establish and maintain a computerised system, with the commitment of government resources and capacity. A cost-benefit analysis may prove long-term effectiveness. Mechanisms for amendment of records and assurance of confidentiality need to be part of the system and the law. Verification through fingerprints prevents fraud by individuals trying falsely to get identity cards. [Malaysia]



'MyKid' identification card in Malaysia

- Civil registration officials killed in the tsunami have not been fully replaced and among the remaining officers, understanding of the standard mechanisms of civil registration is limited.
- Low awareness among tsunami victims of the importance of civil documents. They are prioritising logistical support instead, since they have not seen direct benefits of birth registration in their post-tsunami lives.

Plenary on Birth Registration: Post Earthquake and Tsunami in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam by Dr Malyono Mawar, Director General Secretary of Population Administration, Ministry of Home Affairs, Indonesia

Working Together to Prevent Statelessness

In Thailand, we have a high birth registration rate of 95% yet we are trying to fill the small remaining gap, particularly in relation to ethnic minority groups living in remote areas and migrant children from neighbouring countries, regardless of the status of their parents. In doing so, the Thai government has streamlined procedures and adopted an integrated approach, for example, mobile birth registration teams, awareness-raising campaigns at community level, so that we can reach Universal Birth Registration for all children in Thailand ... It is of vital importance that we work together on this issue. As patterns of migration demonstrate, populations are increasingly mobile, not just within their own country but across borders. If we are to ensure children have an identity then nations must work together to register children and prevent statelessness.

Opening Speech by Khun Kanda Vajrabhaya, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand



Karn Sermchaiwong (IRC) stimulates discussion on statelessness

Partnerships

These successes indicate that partnerships between government, civil society groups, communities, NGOs, UN agencies and donors working in different capacities and at different levels are crucial. No one agency can single-handedly address the wide range of challenges for children. Partnerships are critical – and the success of reaching our goals will depend critically on the strength of our partnerships.

We welcome the workshop held with civil registrars and salute your tireless efforts and the work that you have undertaken. Despite the hurdles, there is no doubt that your work and those of your staff, especially those working in remote communities all over the region, are succeeding in building better systems and getting more children registered. We fully support your efforts to build a strong network in the region and believe this will enhance the success in reaching the important goal of Universal Birth Registration.

Opening Remarks by Rima Salah, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director

Country Priorities

In a final session of the conference, participants reflected on progress to date and the new ideas and energy that this conference generated. Country delegations identified and agreed priorities for action to take Universal Birth Registration forward in their countries. These priorities, which help countries to focus and guide future work, are presented below.

Bangladesh

- Enforce the new legal framework
- Register 90% of children in primary and secondary educational institutions by linking birth registration to education
- Register 70% of children under one year by linking birth registration to routine immunisation
- Establish birth registration information system at central level
- Introduce appropriate mobile registration units

Cambodia

- Achieve 90% birth registration coverage, including minorities and vulnerable groups, by December 2006
- Enhance public awareness and education on child rights, including birth registration
- Review and improve legal instruments governing the civil registration system
- Strengthen institutional capacity for a sustainable civil registration system
- Safe storage of civil registration records by using appropriate mechanisms and a feasibility study for computerisation of civil registration data

China

- Establish a national network on birth registration
- Initiate policy and research on situation, problem, causes and recommendations regarding size and disaggregate data by sex, geography, ethnic group
- Conduct symposia on birth registration
- Continue efforts on improvement and enhancement of policy and regulations on registration, including related policies on social security, health reform and migration
- Integrate birth registration into other child rights promotion campaigns with media and public involvement

India

- Develop strategy to focus on low performing states
- Establish linkages between civil registration and other public services, programmes and policies
- Review and update the Registration of Births and Deaths Act 1969 to make it more people-friendly
- Establish an effective monitoring system at state and district levels
- Strengthen advocacy, awareness-raising and capacity-building
- Clear all backlogs

Indonesia

- Conduct massive campaigns on birth registration involving children and youth participation at national, provincial, district and village levels
- Launch national campaign on free birth registration by the President
- Establish social mobilisation programmes to optimise birth registration coverage, through women's groups, teachers, midwives and other community groups
- Ensure that the basic principles on civil registration will be accommodated in the new laws through lobbying relevant commissions and factions in Parliament, including the Women's Caucus

Country Priorities

Indonesia (continued)

- Invite international experts to give input on international principles of civil registration during final discussions of the new law
- Pass and socialise the new law
- Monitor and implement the new law
- Advocate local government to revisit existing local regulations to simplify procedures, provide services free of charge and find ways to bring services closer to people
- Start to develop regulations on data protection in civil registration
- Conduct a study to establish different models of civil registration according to development status (e.g., remote, less developed and developed areas)
- Develop a module to train civil registrars and implement training
- Develop a computerised population information system and build a centralised, national back-up system (to be able to respond to emergencies and disasters)
- Develop standardised procedures to respond to disasters and emergencies

Kiribati

- Encourage concerned government departments to review existing legislation and change it according to realities on the ground
- Conduct a needs assessment to ascertain required number of people
- Conduct training on civil registration laws and procedures
- Conduct a needs assessment for the implementation plan, to ensure required logistical and material support
- Develop a comprehensive and relevant public information and communications plan
- Support mobile registration
- Define support required from other ministries and departments

Lao PDR

- Conduct a rapid appraisal (or situation analysis) of present civil registration in the country, to include review of related laws
- Advocate for the appointment of a focal ministry to organise a multi-agency working group to respond to birth registration
- Conduct activities to raise the level of awareness on the importance of birth registration, e.g., inclusion of birth registration in the 6th Socio-economic Development Plan and the population policy, and participation of children and young people from various ethnic groups
- Build capacities of district and village authorities in implementing the birth registration system
- Increase birth registration coverage by 10% by 2008, based on the results of MICS III 2006, e.g., through regular events such as Children's Days, mobile immunisations and school openings

Malaysia

- Continue to advocate for legal and policy reform
- Strengthen coordinating mechanisms
- Review the present law to meet the situation (death certificate) and providing free replacement birth certificate and MyKad (identification card) for victims of disasters
- Develop a comprehensive advocacy and communications plan, including continuing to build relationships with partner organisations and the media
- Continue to improve the systems and upgrade hardware and software, encouraging full computerisation

Country Priorities

Mongolia

- Revise civil registration law
- Study fees for birth registration and take measures to have free registration
- Increase coverage and registration of marginalised and vulnerable children
- Improve civil registration network nation-wide
- Implement recommendations on advocacy from the 4th Universal Birth Registration Conference

Myanmar

- Promote active coordination between relevant government ministries (Health, National Planning and Economic Development, Home Affairs, Immigration and Population) and other partners and agencies at all levels of planning, implementation and monitoring of the modified vital registration system
- Advocate among decision-makers to make birth registration a priority
- Conduct an assessment of the current system's strengths and weaknesses
- Develop and implement a comprehensive communications strategy to raise awareness and increase support to achieve Universal Birth Registration
- Maximise birth registration opportunities and identify alternative means to increase coverage and reach hard-to-reach areas and groups (e.g., through existing community-based services such as antenatal and postnatal care, immunisation programmes, school enrolment campaign weeks and mobile registration)
- Strengthen the management of the database for Universal Birth Registration

Nepal

- Amend laws to make them simple, comprehensive (addressing conflict and other types of disaster, internally-displaced persons and other at-risk groups), decentralised and gender-friendly; support universal registration (mobile registration)
- Improve logistics with technical equipment, training for local registrars and stakeholders, forms and certificates in Nepali and English, and stationery
- Expand collaborative efforts with government organisations and development partners including local bodies, NGOs and civil society
- Raise awareness by adopting new ideas and activities and expanding geographical coverage
- Network at district and central levels
- Integrate Universal Birth Registration with other services, including education and health services

Pakistan

- Transform the by-laws introduced by North West Frontier Province (NWFP) into rules, after review and adjustment by respective provinces
- Replicate best practices of existing birth registration manual from NWFP in the remaining three provinces in a phased manner
- Extend computerised birth registration model to other districts, in a phased manner, depending on success of model and availability of resources
- Pursue local government to make birth registration free
- Raise awareness of parents and other relevant stakeholders through national-level strategy for sustainable birth registration
- Develop a mechanism for registration of abandoned and unclaimed children and children of immigrants and refugees
- Upload birth registration data acquired by Union Councils to the national database for use by various levels of government
- Strengthen Union Councils in terms of infrastructure and human resources

Country Priorities

Papua New Guinea

- Review and amend the civil registration law
- Further decentralise and build capacity in remaining ten provinces
- Institutionalise birth registration in schools, health facilities and churches
- Improve data management centrally and establish database in remaining 17 provinces
- Conduct social marketing and advocacy activities

Philippines

- Organise mobile registration teams to reach remote Muslim areas, indigenous people and urban areas for the registration of children in need of special protection
- Make the Civil Registration Committees in Mindanao functional as well as in all other regions, including indigenous communities
- Replicate the Augusan Del Norte model in Muslim and indigenous people areas through participation of Muslim and indigenous people youth groups, piloted in ten municipalities in Mindanao as well as with the other regions
- Develop IEC materials in local languages, building on religious teachings and cultural beliefs of Muslims and indigenous persons
- Advocate for enactment of the pending bills on legitimation (HB 4244) and the new civil registry law (HB 4905)
- Reach 100% birth registration coverage in 127 municipalities where the Barangay Civil Registration system is being piloted
- Establish Barangay Civil Registration and Information System
- Build capacity of Barangay civil registration agents, including children and youth
- Include National Statistics Office in the Barangay Council for the Protection of Children Working Group
- Integrate birth registration in Early Childhood Care and Development areas
- Consult with the sub-committee to identify other strategies to reach unregistered Muslim and indigenous peoples' children
- Train National Coalition of Children's Associations of the Philippines on birth registration and mobilise them as volunteers to work with civil registrars

Solomon Islands

- Hold a National Workshop on Birth Registration
- Establish a Births, Deaths and Marriage Working Committee
- Review, assess and collate existing data, legislation and system
- Develop action plan further, with implementation, priorities and timeframes
- Develop budget outlook for implementation
- Identify possible donors
- Source resources to cover implementation

Sri Lanka

- Register vulnerable groups (6%) identified in the study and carry out awareness-raising and collaboration with southern India for refugee returnees
- Maintain the Universal Birth Registration campaign and target vulnerable groups
- Continue to support the replacement of birth certificates lost due to the tsunami and conflict
- Continue to support the pilot data conversion of existing birth certificates to populate the anticipated system, and expand to tsunami-affected areas
- Complete the rehabilitation of the tsunami-affected Division Secretary offices
- Strengthen the capacity of the Division Secretary registrars (each division now has an additional district registrar)
- Ensure continuous training of all persons involved in registration, e.g. health and plantations

Country Priorities

Sri Lanka (continued)

- Ensure continuous training of all persons involved in registration, e.g., health and plantations
- Actively participate in the computerisation of the system
- Support Sri Lanka's participation in the regional registrars network, including peer visits
- Lobby to ensure that the proposed amendments to the act to streamline the registration of births in the estate sector are approved
- Conduct a national survey on Birth and Death Registration under the government Health Sector Development Project (Department of Census and Statistics, last done in 1980)
- Explore the possibility of supporting National Identity Card issuance, particularly for youth

Thailand

- Provide further training for local registration officials and schools on Thailand's 2005 National Strategy on Legal Status and Rights, to ensure common understanding and implementation, targeting the most vulnerable groups: illegal migrants and hill tribe populations; training to ensure that all children in the school system receive legal status
- Encourage district-level children's councils which will be established in 2006, to address issues of birth registration and to assist in surveying children in their respective districts who lack birth registration or legal status
- Develop and distribute IEC materials on the importance of birth registration and birth registration processes to both legal and illegal migrant workers from neighbouring countries
- Build a network of INGOs, local NGOs and international organisations on the issue of Universal Birth Registration in Thailand, as well as on linkages with statelessness
- Conduct a review of present national laws and policies concerning birth registration and legal status, as well as actual implementation at local levels, for the purposes of legal reform and clarification of procedures
- Conduct a sub-regional review of civil registration systems in Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Myanmar for the purposes of inter-country cooperation on nationality verification and the improvement of national civil registration systems

Timor Leste

- Discuss the draft code to ensure it is non-discriminatory, before it is approved by the Council of Ministers
- Lobby ministers and Members of Parliament to ensure that the code is passed as soon as possible (using the Children's Parliament)
- Training for communities
- Involve the Children's Parliament to get their support in promoting Universal Birth Registration
- Develop a strategy to involve children and young people in all aspects of awareness-raising
- Meet with UNICEF, Plan, ministers and vice-ministers to investigate the progress of the code and Universal Birth Registration.
- Organise a press conference (with Minister's approval, support and involvement)
- Organise a mini-workshop for NGOs and other interested people to inform them about Universal Birth Registration and this conference (participants to include NGOs involved in child rights, mother and child health, education and church groups)
- Review and develop Universal Birth Registration strategies
- Seek to get Universal Birth Registration incorporated into school curricula
- Get the church (and other NGOs and supporters such as ADB) interested and involved in Universal Birth Registration

Country Priorities

Vanuatu

- Review and revise legislation
- Increase staff, upgrade skills and equipment, more interdepartmental collaboration
- Share information, hold training and workshops on legislation and procedures
- Develop a comprehensive plan to raise community and official awareness of the value of birth registration
- Define support required from other ministries and install an efficient, backed up, computerised system and enter all registrations to improve efficiency and storage

Vietnam

- Build capacity of civil registrars at commune level, especially those working in remote and poor mountainous areas, on birth registration procedures, data management, accurate reporting and communication
- Raise awareness on the importance of birth registration for parents, communities, youth, children and local authorities
- Improve facilities for civil registrars at commune level
- Enforce the regulations for free birth registration for children from poor families and ethnic minority groups
- Pilot computerised civil registration and nationality system in Hanoi
- Provide legal aid and social services on birth registration for children in need of special protection



A participant considers country priorities



Participants formulate 2006 country priorities

Caring

I do not intend to be disrespectful in imitating the three Rs of the well-chosen subtitle of our conference (Record, Recognise, Respect) by introducing four Cs – Caring, Comprehensive, Conducive and Capable – in my conclusions. The ‘c’ for ‘caring’ concerns children with special needs, including especially physically and mentally disabled children whose registration requires extra care and promotion. The Committee on the Rights of the Child’s concluding observations repeatedly mention the exclusion of such children from the birth registration process. It is clear that laws cannot always influence the attitudes and behaviour of parents and communities who might regard the registration of such children to be far from necessary. But the law can provide a signal that governments care about all children on their territory. That in turn is certain to provoke attitudinal changes in parents as well as the population as a whole.

*Plenary on Aristotle → Rule of Law → UNCRC → Legal Frameworks for Birth Registration
by Ellen Mouravieff-Apostol, NGO Committee on UNICEF*

The Future of Universal Birth Registration in Asia and the Pacific

A panel comprising representatives of young people, Plan, UNICEF, delegates from Asia and the Pacific, and government offered their perspectives on the opportunities and challenges which lie ahead and proposed some ideas for taking birth registration forward. Here are some excerpts from the panel discussion.

Increasing Participation

The Universal Birth Registration mission strongly speaks that no child shall be left unregistered. Therefore, governments should strengthen their institutions to deliver public services and intensify advocacy on birth registration and networking with different organisations working for children.

The participation of agencies, from local to national levels, will be a great value. Establishing systems to make the registration more accessible and mobilising the participation of young people in the community can be effective strategies in attaining the goals of Universal Birth Registration

Maria Corazon Buala, Youth Participant

Plan Will Support

- Increasing understanding of the importance of birth registration and the linkages to development and children's well-being among key target groups, legislators, policy-makers, local government, parents, children and youth
- Advocating for and supporting legal and policy reform on inclusive, accessible, non-discriminatory, easy-to-understand birth registration laws and regulations
- Supporting building of technical capacity and expertise on efficient birth registration systems and structures among civil registrars and others in Asia, and
- Mobilising resources locally and internationally towards achieving Universal Birth Registration, putting birth registration higher on the national, regional and international agenda.



Broad cooperation and partnership are keys. The actors themselves – children, families, communities and governments – need to work together as rights-bearers, especially governments. Government must have the will to act. If government will not act, nothing will happen. The Civil Registrars have met to officially organise the Asia-Pacific Network of Civil Registrars and we thank and congratulate all the Civil Registrars for that. Some have already begun talking about south-south cooperation, such as India and Sri Lanka, Malaysia and the Philippines, and Sri Lanka and Malaysia.

Universal Birth Registration is now on the map. Plan will support initiatives to ensure that this continues and commit ourselves to the following regional- and country-level activities:

- Support the plans of the newly-formed Asia-Pacific Civil Registrars Network
- Together with other agencies, support and promote bilateral and regional dialogue on cross-border issues related to birth registration
- Promote and support research, sharing of lessons learned and solutions, in particular replication of proven models, and
- Mobilise resources so that incomplete coverage can be addressed.

Myrna Evora, Regional Director (Incoming), Plan Asia

UNICEF is Committed

The future of Universal Birth Registration in this region is bright. The starting point is the high level of commitment shown by governments and other partners reflected in legislation, policy and concrete action on the ground.

UNICEF is pleased and proud to be part of this alliance and remains committed to supporting efforts to achieve Universal Birth Registration, based on its commitment to working with governments and other partners to ensure that the rights intoned in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are realised for all children. Therefore we would endorse the call for Universal Birth Registration by 2015.

We also recognise the multi-sectoral nature of birth registration and the need to target support at three parts of the registration chain most in need of support:

- Planning and statistics, and systems development
- Social mobilisation, advocacy and communication, and
- Child protection.

The challenges are many, particularly of reaching the last 5-10%. Different countries are at different stages of progression with birth registration. Let's make it 100%! It is important that we reach every child. Early birth registration is also critical, so children don't miss out on opportunities later in life. This requires good governance and simplification of procedures.

We need to identify what groups are left out and to plan with health, education and other services to reach the unreached, the most difficult groups. We may need to link up with these services to get their assistance in reaching children. This is one more reason why we need to work together to strategise and do research.

Chris Davids, Regional Planning Officer, UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific

Building Political Will

Birth registration is not only about giving our children the civil status of the right to a name and nationality, but also about:

- Improving good governance, at all levels
- Making our children more visible in the national development planning process and distribution of wealth, and
- Accelerating girls' education and gender participation.

This needs political will. Birth registration needs to be noted in the medium-term strategies for distribution of wealth and development programmes. In terms of disasters, we have learnt about the need for:

- Better coordination with stakeholders
- Decision-making at top speed, and
- Community pressure and a pragmatic approach.

There must be a comprehensive plan for birth registration. This is an important issue from both development and human rights perspectives.

Dickson Kiragi, Birth Registration Advisor, Office of Civil Registry, Papua New Guinea



Birth registration poster

Simplifying Procedures

There is still a lot to be done to achieve the desired results ... Raising awareness with policy-makers and other stakeholders requires our full focus and concern.

At policy-making level, adequate resources need to be put in place for Universal Birth Registration. Until that happens, substantial progress cannot be made. Policy-makers should simplify the procedures and forms, to encourage people to go for Universal Birth Registration ... so that people take it in the right spirit – not just shuffle paper. We need regular reviews at all levels, to identify gaps and who is responsible, i.e., an effective monitoring system.

We should respond to disasters and draw up simplified response systems ... We need disaster preparedness so the system will not fail us. For disadvantaged children, my request to policy-makers, Plan, UNICEF and other NGOs is please do not lose track of them.

Naeem Khan, Federal Secretary, Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education, Pakistan

Harnessing the Media

The prospects for Universal Birth Registration are great and bright. I am a born optimist – the fact that young people like Cora and old people like me are here will ensure that. The target of 100% must be an ideal and we must try to reach that ideal as practically as possible within our constraints. Some of the problems are universal – these include poverty and lack of information.

If the people are not aware of registering, they won't. And they won't bother if it's a choice between registering and buying a loaf of bread or sack of rice. We need to outline the benefits and explain to people the great advantages of registering their child, so they don't miss out on opportunities. Harnessing media support will help to create awareness of the need for and the benefits of birth registration.

Senator Aquilino Q Pimentel Jr, Philippines



Working in Partnership and Networking

An important practical outcome of this conference is that the Civil Registrars have decided to set up a network to continue supporting each other in this vital work. Congratulations!

Country and regional priorities will provide a basis for future actions. On each of the four conference themes, delegates have agreed on some principles, e.g., that registration should be universal, compulsory and free. They have expressed some special concerns, such as for stateless and undocumented migrants, and they have made practical recommendations. The conference statement recognises that tremendous progress has already been made in the growing numbers of children registered. Even more encouraging are the goals and the commitments that some of the delegates have expressed. Your determination is inspiring.

We have gained immensely from working in partnership, with governments, UNICEF, other NGOs, children and their communities. Each partner brings a different and necessary element to such a campaign. We have proved how powerful alliances like these can be to influence governments and others who provide services to the communities with whom we work. That is the way forward to enable children to participate fully and realise their potential.

Closing Remarks by Anne Grant, Plan International Board Member and Vice-Chair



Panelists from the Future of Universal Birth Registration session, Dickson Kiragi (Papua New Guinea) and Carmelita Ericta (Civil Registrar General, Philippines) with Senator Aquilino Q. Pimentel Jr (Philippines) and Naeem Khan (Pakistan)



Rima Salah (UNICEF) and Lina Laigo (Council for the Welfare of Children) as the conference wraps up

Building Commitment at All Levels

The Civil Registrars Network is an important development. UNICEF and Plan are ready to support this initiative. Kofi Annan is also committed to birth registration.

The media makes mountains move and we depend on it to bring the message to every family and every community. Our goal is 100% registration and we are going to reach that goal, starting with all of you. Let's commit to registering all children. On behalf of UNICEF, I commit to helping you. We are with you always.

Closing Remarks by Rima Salah, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

Including All

Thailand's recent policy (January 2005) introduces new laws and regulations to implement surveys and support birth registration, including the issuance of birth certificates and 13-digit ID cards which have been issued with household registration since the end of December 2005. An identification document is now issued for everyone who resides in Thailand, regardless of their illegal entry, so that they can enjoy basic rights in education and health.

Closing Remarks by Krairarch Kaewdee, Director of Civil Registration Division, Thailand



No Child is Left Unregistered

Everyday, we continue to read, hear and see the faces of children whose rights are violated. To all delegates, on behalf of the children and youth, we urge you to support us and guide us in our journey towards building a child-friendly community and country where every child enjoys his or her rights and no child is left unregistered!

Plenary on Awareness Raising on Child Rights Issues by Children and Youth by Karen S Bigay, Representative, Bicol Regional Sub-committee on the Welfare of Children, Philippines

Evaluation Excerpts

Delegates appreciated the conference organisation, opportunities for participating, sharing, learning and networking, and the sessions themselves.

- *Lots of opportunities to participate, talk, interact and learn with people from countries in the region and share experiences of different issues and best practices*
 - *Participation of government, young people and civil registrars*
 - *Interesting and helpful parallel sessions with a good variety of topics and appropriate number of participants*
 - *Greater emphasis on more sensitive issues this time, such as migration, citizenship and refugees*
 - *Establishment of Civil Registrars Network*
 - *Good opportunity to review progress on Universal Birth Registration from the 2003 conference and take priorities forward*
-

Learning during the conference included a better understanding of the issues; Universal Birth Registration practice and experience in the region; disasters and emergencies; challenges and gaps, and approaches and strategies for addressing these; success stories; the importance of youth participation, political commitment, networks, linkages, monitoring and commitment to rights; IEC (information, education and communication), advocacy and computerisation.

- *Challenges can be overcome by coordinated efforts of many related partners*
 - *Despite challenges and constraints, Universal Birth Registration is reachable as long as there is commitment at all levels, proper coordination, sustainable, efficient systems and a fully informed population*
 - *Involve children, use media more effectively and it is important for government to own the process*
 - *Why Universal Birth Registration is vital and how it can be achieved*
 - *The unresolved issues – such as nationality and citizenship of migrants*
-

The range of personal commitments from delegates referred to working to support cooperation, coordination, collaboration, analysis and planning, advocacy and awareness-raising, building understanding, youth participation, reaching all children, legal reform, resources, monitoring, developing systems and implementation.

- *Strengthen cooperation between government, UN agencies and INGOs at national level to work together*
 - *Focus on district-level empowerment to develop systems for Universal Birth Registration achievement*
 - *Support government to speed up legal reform and system development*
 - *Talk about Universal Birth Registration with all where there are opportunities*
 - *Ensure our programmes support the registration system in our country and focus our efforts on vulnerable children*
 - *Make all efforts to provide rights to children as laid down in the UNCRC through the government machinery by mobilising all available resources*
 - *Develop a project proposal to generate more funds for Universal Birth Registration*
 - *Commit to utilise all resources available within my organisation to ensure 100% birth registration and computerisation of data*
 - *Work hard for the attainment of the stated 2006 priorities in my country and region*
-

Suggestions for future conferences included case studies, focused sessions, more bi- and multi-lateral discussions, greater participation, clear assessment of progress, a field visit, country presentations, translations and logistical support.

RECORD RECOGNISE RESPECT

4th Asia and the Pacific Regional Conference on
UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION
13-17 MARCH 2006
REPORT