



Obituary of Dr Nafis Sadik, President of the Society for International Development, 1994–1997

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Dr Nafis Sadik has died in New York in August 2022, just days short of her 93rd birthday. Dr Sadik will be remembered for her extraordinary work for sexual and reproductive health and rights as executive director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) from 1987 to 2000 and as special adviser to the United Nations secretary-general and special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific.

Dr Sadik, born in Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh, was trained as an obstetrician-gynaecologist, practising obstetrics and gynaecology in rural communities across Pakistan, and was director general of Pakistan's Central Family Planning Council during the 1960s. Moving to the global stage, Dr Sadik was the first woman to lead a UN agency and Secretary General of the path breaking 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo which brought about enormous changes in women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), changing population planning strategies to put women and children's rights at the centre while also looking at men's responsibility 'choice not chance'.

The community of the Society for International Development (SID) welcomed Dr Sadik as its President from 1994 to 1997, following the success of Cairo. With Dr Sadik's support, SID ran a series of SRHR programmes in different parts of the Global South, and later with a focus on South–South exchange between civil society, practitioners and policymakers in South Asia and East Africa.

My first task as Editor of SID journal *Development* was to select outstanding papers from the 1988 World Conference held in New Delhi. Dr. Sadik's article 'Women, the Centre of Development', *Development* (1): 30–31 was among the first

articles I published, and it was among the 50 most influential pieces in the journal republished in 2006.

Under her guidance, the SID journal published extensively on SRHR, beginning with a probing issue in 1991 on young women and life choices and for the next 10 years reviewed the remarkable progress on SRHR that was made with the work of Dr Sadik through the auspices of UNFPA. As the current UNFPA Executive Director Natalia Kanem stated: Dr. Sadik was a 'proud champion of choice and tireless advocate for women's health, rights and empowerment'.

On a personal note, Dr Sadik showed me the skills of how to lead without losing your feminine power. I recall the beautiful sarees she wore as took the podium in front of 1000s to speak compellingly about women's right to choose. Despite her esteemed high place in the UN hierarchy, she was a great mentor to young women like me. When we spoke together, as two women in the SID community, preparing events, she spoke her mind in ways that enabled me to see how the politics of the development world operated, from a gender and cultural perspective. She was able to use her position well, for the good of so many. Even in a small way I saw that. When she was President of SID and I was an advocate for European women's NGOs for women's sexual rights, she was willing to listen to our demands, while also being clear what was possible for a UN leader to say or not say.

After she had retired, she kindly invited me to tea at her home in New York and we reminisced. She again made it so clear that what her life-long goal was—to listen to women's needs, and involve women as drivers of development policy. For her, without women's involvement in decision-making, society cannot flourish.

As the testimonies flow in about all she achieved in her life, it is evident that many of us will continue her legacy.

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