

**Statement to the Commission on Population and Development
Acting as Preparatory Committee for the Special Session
of the General Assembly**

As written

**STATEMENT TO THE COMMISSION ON
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT
ACTING AS PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR
THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

by

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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Desai, Dr. Sadik, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome the distinguished delegates, representatives, and all others who are participating in the Commission on Population and Development acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly. In addition, I would also like to express my congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman, and to the other distinguished delegates elected to the Bureau. My colleagues and I working in the Secretariat will do our utmost to assist you and this Commission in its important deliberations in coming days.

This morning I am pleased to introduce to the Commission the Report of the **Secretary-General** on the quinquennial review and appraisal of the progress made in achieving the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The relevant Commission document before you is **E/CN.9/1999/PC/2**. The full version of the review and appraisal has been issued as a working paper (**ESA/P/WP.148**) and is also available to the preparatory committee.

I am often asked the question: "What has been achieved since the adoption of the Programme of Action?" My usual reply is: "Read the reports, especially the full version." As you can imagine, this reply is not so well received. With some exasperation, the usual response back is: "Oh no, I can't do that; I don't have the time. Just tell me the five major conclusions."

Well, I still strongly recommend reading these reports, especially the full version. However, this morning on an exceptional basis, I will attempt to highlight, in my view, the five major conclusions of the review and appraisal report.

First, the period we are living in is demographically unprecedented in the history of humanity. Mr. Chairman, we in this room, as well as every person in the world, are participating in a "quiet revolution" that is as important or more important than many of the political revolutions of the past. We are all aware of and familiar with political revolutions, such as the French, American, Russian and Chinese revolutions. Such revolutions have had tremendous and long-lasting global effects.

However, one revolution has been taking place and continues today that is less well known. Relatively few appreciate the magnitude and extent of its enormous impact on individuals, families, communities, nations, regions and the world as a whole. This quiet revolution is the demographic transition. This revolutionary transition from high rates of fertility and mortality to low rates has significantly altered every aspect of human existence on this planet. This transition, which began several centuries ago in Western Europe, continues to have an extraordinary impact today in every corner of the world.

As a consequence of this revolutionary transition, this half century, i.e., 1950-2000, has been demographically the most remarkable and unprecedented in human history. During this 50 year period, for example, we have seen: (1) the highest rate of world population growth, around 2 per cent in the late 1960s; (2) the largest annual increase in world population, **around** 86 million per year in the late 1980s; (3) the shortest period for the world to increase by one billion people, the 12 years between 1987 and 1999; (4) the most significant increase in world's average life

expectancy at birth, from 46 to 66 years today; (5) the most rapid decreases in fertility, from an average of six children in developing countries to three children per couple today; and (6) the unparalleled growth of urban agglomerations, with urban dwellers very soon outnumbering the rural population for the first time in the world's history.

The various international population conferences that have taken place over the last few decades, including the International Conference on Population and Development, have sought to accelerate this demographic revolution. In particular, the Programme of Action states in paragraph 6.3 the following:

“Recognizing that the ultimate goal is the improvement of the quality of life of present and future generations, the objective is to facilitate the demographic transition as soon as possible in countries where there is an imbalance between demographic rates and social, economic and environmental goals, while fully respecting human rights. This process will contribute to the stabilization of the world population, and together with changes in unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, to sustainable development and economic growth. ”

Second, generally speaking, things are moving in the right direction. Overall progress has been made, though in varying degrees, towards reducing poverty rates, increasing food supplies and improving health and education. Mortality in most countries has continued to fall since ICPD. Reproductive health programmes have been established in many countries and contraceptive use among couples indicates greater accessibility to family planning and greater ability of men and women to choose freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children.

Many countries, both sending and receiving, have taken important steps, particularly at the regional level to manage international migration flows through bi-national and multinational agreements. In addition, many civil society organizations are contributing to the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects on their own or in partnerships with governmental and intergovernmental institutions.

However, in some regions and for some countries, progress has been limited, and in some cases setbacks have occurred. Even though poverty rates have declined sharply in many countries in recent years, progress has been uneven; more than 1.3 billion people are still classified as poor. The AIDS pandemic has led to rises in mortality in many countries, particularly in Africa. Political shocks and adjustments from the transition to market economies for a number of countries in Europe and Asia have slowed down or reversed the progress in mortality reduction, especially among adult males. It appears that the shock of the “Asian crisis” on the developing world became manifest in 1998. Output of the developing countries as a whole grew by the smallest amount since 1983, following six successive years of robust expansion. There are indications that the financial crises presently affecting social welfare in countries of East Asia and elsewhere will limit global progress in implementing the Programme of Action.

Third, many challenges remain ahead. Some challenges have been with us for some time, such as: reducing infant, child and maternal mortality; increasing the availability of health services, including family planning; the provision of basic sanitation, water supply and food safety; children; managing the growth of urban agglomerations and mega-cities; eliminating

poverty; educating all our children; addressing international migration and refugee flows; and stabilizing world population growth.

Some challenges are relatively new, such as the AIDS epidemic; the rapid ageing of populations; adolescent reproductive behaviour; stagnation of mortality improvement and even increases in mortality levels; international cooperation for the prevention of undocumented migration and trafficking in migrants; below replacement fertility; and declines in the population size of some nations.

This year, according to our estimates, the population of the world reaches the historic mark of 6 billion people. Also, the world's population is likely to reach nearly 9 billion by the year 2050; nearly all of this growth will be taking place in less developed countries. The predominant view in recent years, as reflected in the Programme of Action, is that slower rates of population growth can buy more time to adjust and can increase countries' ability to attack poverty, protect and repair the environment, and build the base for future sustainable development. As you will recall, the Programme of Action in paragraph 1.11 of its Preamble, emphasized the crucial contribution that early population stabilization would make to the achievement of sustainable development.

Despite significant declines in rates of population growth, rapid population growth remains a concern for a majority of Governments in developing countries. For the increasing number of Governments concerned by low or negative rates of population growth, there are no well tested policy recipes to follow. The coming years may therefore see broader discussion of policy alternatives. Governments are likely to benefit from comparing ideas and experiences, and from continued efforts to improve understanding of the forces underlying their changing demographic circumstances.

In addition, problems associated with inappropriate population distribution plague many countries, particularly in developing regions, and pose serious obstacles to sustainable development. I invite you to ponder the implications of the following finding: only about one fourth of countries are satisfied with their patterns of spatial distribution.

While notable progress has been made in extending family planning and other reproductive health services, the task of securing reproductive choice is unfinished and in some countries has barely begun. Continued and enhanced efforts to meet the growing demand for reproductive health services will directly benefit men and women, and will also help to buy time for the achievement of broader development goals.

Fourth, while financial resources are necessary, government leadership, priorities and commitment are the critical variables for successful implementation of the Programme of Action. As I noted earlier, overall progress has been made towards reducing poverty rates. Also, recent economic and social reforms have produced what was potentially the best environment in decades for international assistance. However, overseas development assistance has declined markedly in recent years. In 1997, for instance, it is reported that OECD donors gave the smallest share of their GNPs in aid since comparable statistics began in the 1950s; the share was less than one-quarter of one per cent. In addition, it is estimated that in order to restore OECD aid to its level

in the early 1990s, it would require approximately a 50 per cent increase over today's levels.

As the General Assembly noted in its resolution 53/172, a most important question that needs to be addressed by the international community in the process of globalization is the need to mobilize resources for such goals as poverty reduction, human resources development, and health and education. Adequate financial resources at the national and international levels are certainly necessary to achieve the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action. However, the national experiences highlighted in the review and appraisal report show that resources on their own do not necessarily lead to sustained progress. Our findings, therefore, further support the conclusion in the Programme of Action stating that in instances where the leadership is strongly committed, countries have been able to mobilize sustained commitment at all levels to make population and development programmes and projects successful. Commitment and appropriate action need to be supported by knowledge that is sound, comprehensive and up-to-date.

Fifth, the time to act is now. The 1990s witnessed a series of conferences covering the major critical issues in the social and economic sector - education, children, environment, human rights, population, poverty, status of women, urban habitat, and food security. Many of the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action mirror and complement the goals and objectives of these parallel conferences. Together, they have established an international consensus on the development issues confronting the international community.

Since ICPD, many countries have revised their population policies and programmes in line with the recommendations of the Programme of Action. Also, during the last few years the number and strength of non-governmental organizations committed to population and development concerns have grown significantly. Delaying today's needed action will exacerbate issues in the future, making them more difficult and costly to address. The decisions and actions taken today, whatever they may be, will to a great extent determine the quality of life and living conditions for all generations to come.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, after having highlighted the five major conclusions of the review and appraisal report, one may legitimately ask: "What's next?"

Well, the next quinquennial review and appraisal of progress made in achieving the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action is scheduled for the year 2004. The deliberations and conclusions of this preparatory committee as **well as** the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly in June will contribute greatly to progress in implementing the Programme of Action over the next five years and beyond. With sufficient resources and committed government action, I am confident that the review and appraisal to be undertaken in the year 2004 will no doubt document enormous progress in achieving the goals and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.