

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

As written

CROATIA

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**Commission on Population and Development acting as the
preparatory committee for the special session of the
General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the
implementation of the Programme of Action of the
International Conference on Population and Development**

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My delegation would like to extend its congratulations to you Mr. Chairman **upon** your election to this important post. We would also like to thank the Secretariat for the preparation of the two informative reports of the Secretary General for this Preparatory Commission and for the briefings that have been provided by Dr **Nafis Sadik**, Mr. Joseph Chamie and others during the course of this week. They have, as always, been very informative and useful for our discussions and negotiations. The reports provide a good summary of the relevant issues, both in respect of actual implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action and **also** what remains to be done in its implementation as we prepare for coming Special Session.

Mr Chairman,

In the view of my delegation the five year review of the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development presents an important opportunity to reconfirm the Programme of Action, examine progress made in its implementation to date, as well as to make some recommendations for the future on the basis of the analysis of the implementation process.

Looking back at the five years which have passed since the adoption of the Programme of Action, it is clear that while there have been many positive achievements in moving towards the goals set there are areas which continue to require particular attention. The passage of five years has seen the confirmation of certain demographic trends which were evident in Cairo, action at a national level through the legislative process, and multilaterally.

The fundamental goal of the well being of human beings within the context of sustainable development requires reference to issues such as **population growth, structure and distribution**. The trends, of which we have heard during the meeting of the Commission earlier this week, among others, constitute a challenging dichotomy of large numbers of young and aging persons in the world, representing the changing age structure of the population. My delegation is pleased that the international community has responded **by addressing** these issues both in this forum, as well as others in the United Nations system and outside of it.

The developmental aspects of our considerations point to the need for continued efforts in the areas of **universal reproductive health services, gender equality** and the **empowerment of women**, particularly in the context of the present constraints imposed by the global financial crisis. In this regard, the recent meetings of the Commission on Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women, and the key Programmes of Action whose monitoring they are implementing, along with the Cairo Programme of Action, constitute a significant part of the complementary multilateral base for dealing with

these issues. Experience has shown that we need to continue to work on reproductive health and **maternal mortality, as well as ensuring the** inclusion of a gender perspective into policy formulation. In this regard the recommendations of the Secretary General represent a solid basis for our work.

We should also continue to explore the links between population and **sustainable development**. As we have seen from the issues identified in the documents before us, as well as **from** the themes chosen for the coming sessions of the Commission on Population and Development, economic and social development and the environment constitute important elements in the attainment of the Cairo goals.

My delegation is pleased to note the high level of involvement of **civil society in this** Preparatory Commission and believes that it has an important part to play in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

Mr Chairman,

Croatia belongs to the group of countries which are concerned with their **low rate of population growth** and its consequences for long-term human and **socio-economic** development. The dynamic components of Croatia's population growth, especially that of the natural increase of population, are similar to that of Western European countries. However, a specific feature of Croatian population growth was that while in the 1980s and 1990s Croatia recorded roughly the same below replacement **total fertility rate (TF'R)** as many developed countries, it continued to be at a considerably lower level of economic and social development. By itself this would not be alarming, but it has important consequences for further aging, increased dependency burden and loss of innovative capacity of the population.

The demographic transition in Croatia was completed in the late **1970s**, accelerated by the long-lasting impact of **population outmigration** toward overseas and developed European countries. The present demographic situation is the result of a steady decline of fertility and a low natural increase, a negative migration balance, the consequence of two World Wars, and **especially** of the recent war of aggression imposed against the country.

Between the last two censuses (1981 and **1991**), the annual growth rate was 0.4 per cent, but if the population working abroad is excluded, this growth rate was only 0.24 per cent. In the **1990s**, the aggression against Croatia caused further **deterioration of demographic trends. The war casualties** and massive displacement of population caused an absolute decline in numbers. It is estimated that **from** 1991 to 1998 the population fell by **3 percent, but taking into** account only the population living in the country, numbers fell by 6.2 percent.'

¹ According to recent estimates the total population of Croatia declined from 4 785 thousand in 1991 to 4 639 thousand **in** 1998.

The declining population growth rate was determined by a steady decrease in the birth rate and a slightly rising death rate with a constant negative migration balance. **The recent war worsened all population components and structures.** It caused a natural decrease of population, direct loss of human life (16,000 deaths, 28,000 wounded) and a great number of displaced persons and refugees. Given the fact that a census shall be carried out in the year 2001, precise migration figures will only be available after **obtaining this data** In the 1990s the natural increase turned to natural decrease (the death rate was higher than the birth rate). The rate of natural decrease was greatest in 1992 (-1 .0 per thousand) and persisted throughout the 1990s for the “in country” population. In 1997, **TFR was** estimated at 1.67 and the net reproduction rate at 0.74. The continuation of outmigration **from** Croatia worsened the whole picture and enhanced the process of depopulation.

The **age structure of the population is deteriorating, with** a declining number and share of the young and an expanding number and share of the elderly. The population projections for the year 2021, **with** migration component excluded, show a total population decline of 7 per cent, a decline in the population of the young by 17 per cent, a decline in population of working age of 12 per cent (and their aging), and an increase of the aged part of the population by 28 per cent. The aging in the next decade will increase, putting more pressure on the pension funds, the health care system and other social services.

These are challenges that the Croatian authorities **will** face in defining and implementing the national population policy. Population rehabilitation and its social integration is a strategic priority of the overall development of the country. In view of the numerous unfavorable population changes, the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia adopted in January 1996 the **National Demographic Development Programme**. Its objectives are to revive population growth and make a more balanced spatial distribution of population, destimulate outmigration and stimulate returns from abroad The urgent task is to return displaced persons and refugees to their homes. In order to achieve this end, Croatia needs international assistance which, although promised, is still being awaited in any significant quantity.

Besides the programme of reconstruction of devastated parts of the country which emphasizes the short-run tasks of **economic and social reintegration** of the devastated regions, the National Demographic **Development Programme** envisages a series of **different** measures of fertility rehabilitation and social assistance (paid maternity leave, tax relief for persons supporting children, child allowances for low income families, etc.). These measures are intended to encourage families to have their desired number of children by creating better living conditions and helping them to ease the **difficulties** of having more children. **Reproductive health care** and assistance during pregnancy and child delivery is widely available. During maternity leave, mothers' employment and social security status is protected However, available financial resources for that purpose are limited due to budgetary constraints.

An important issue is the problem of refugees and displaced persons. The return of displaced persons and refugees is now under way. Many of them have returned through organized forms to their homes or placement to third countries, but it will take some more time to complete the process. It will depend on the speed of reconstruction and restoring of confidence (reconstruction of homes and other facilities, creation of jobs, **demining**, reconciliation and fair treatment of all, etc.). In June 1998, the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia adopted the **Programme for the Return and Accommodation of Displaced Persons, Refugees and Resettled Persons**. This document regulates the procedure and assistance for return on the basis of the unconditional right to return repossession of property and assistance for economic and social integration of all citizens and other persons who could be regarded as refugees in accordance with the relevant international instruments (Geneva Convention of 195 1 and other UN documents). Return should be voluntary and based on the exercise of free and well-informed choice. The Programme is elaborated in co-operation and under the supervision of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, recent demographic trends and the general conditions of sustainable development in Croatia are slowly improving, but the rate of population reproduction is still well below replacement level. The process of depopulation and progressive aging will continue and increase into the foreseeable future. For future population development in Croatia, the crucial issue will be the extent and direction of migration flows. Under conditions of unemployment, low income, housing problems and other economic, social and financial constraints which will still prevail in the coming years - it will be difficult to control and reduce the outmigration of younger and educated people and markedly improve overall demographic trends. Faster economic growth and **better social services for all, will** be the dominant factor in **stabilizing** and improving demographic development in Croatia, but the importance of population policy in its broader sense, within the context of sustainable development, will also grow.

My delegation looks forward to the work ahead and the maintenance of an integrated approach to population and development in the continued implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.