

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

As written



**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 ICPD Programme of Action**

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*Statement by Mr Jacques du Guerny
Chief: Population Programme Service
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

Mr/Ms Chairperson, ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Conference on Population and Development was an event of major importance for the international community's involvement in population matters. It **reaffirmed** the key role of population in global issues, opened debate about a range of themes and resulted in the adoption of a far-reaching Programme of Action. It is worth recalling that the Conference's title distinguished the Cairo meeting from its two predecessors in that it contained the word 'development'. Because the ICPD had broader terms of reference, it was expected to take much **further** the **efforts** made in Bucharest and Mexico City.

When the consensus reached at previous Population Conferences is borne in mind, the ICPD Programme of Action can be said to be truly innovative, especially in the area of reproductive health. For the **first** time, a population action document applied the broad concept of reproductive **health**; identified sexuality as a fundamental aspect of human existence; and expressed an undivided commitment to the goal of the empowerment of women. In addition to introducing these ideas, the ICPD made a number of more **detailed observations** and adopted many in-depth reproductive health recommendations.

While the importance of the Cairo **Conference** for the reproductive health field is well known and generally acknowledged, it should however not be forgotten that the ICPD also **reaffirmed** the importance of the interplay between population change and development factors. The ICPD Programme of Action specified three important principles which are of **much importance for developmental policies: the objective of making the socio-economic systems sustainable; the need to stimulate economic growth in order to reduce poverty; and the right to development as an essential human right. The Programme also addressed those demographic issues that are closely interconnected with development – morbidity and mortality differentials, population ageing, and migration.**

Today, five years **after** Cairo, it is evident **that the main** emphasis on the implementation of the **ICPD** outcomes has been on reproductive rights and reproductive health. To be sure, the need to promote reproductive health for the purposes of advancing **social and economic goals** applies universally, **and hence** that agenda is fully justified. However, while the emphasis on reproductive health issues has proven useful in many ways, it has also led to an **imbalanced** follow-up to other elements of the ICPD Plan of Action. Subject matters such as the population aspects of **sustainable** development and environmental change, urban-rural distribution, migration movements and demographic ageing have arguably not received the attention they deserve. As the world approaches the third millennium, problems associated

with changing population age and sex structures, inappropriate spatial distribution, undocumented migration, or population-related environmental degradation **trouble** many countries. Although these issues pose serious obstacles to global sustainable development, they are still insufficiently reflected at the international level.

The 1994 Cairo Conference and the World Food Summit held in 1996 have greatly influenced FAO's work on the interdependencies between population and development. These two meetings have helped FAO to enrich its perspective with a more **humanised** concern for the welfare of people. The main conclusion emerging **from** FAO's recent work in the population area is that each of the various types of economic setup and societal organization devised by human beings has specific linkages with rural development, population and biophysical environment. Population, **natural resource** and environmental issues interact in manifold ways, depending on local **ecological** conditions, historical heritage, culture, production and consumption patterns, and institutional realities. The relationships between demographic change and development factors are extremely complex and do not lend themselves to simplistic interpretations or simplified interventions.

FAO's experience in the area of population clearly indicates that the international community needs to start looking at issues that so far have received insufficient attention but have serious long-term implications and thus require immediate action. Today's population challenges have less to do with isolated 'problems' than with how societies will organize themselves to cope with the multifaceted process of transformation they are undergoing. To achieve this objective, countries have to better comprehend their population situation, develop greater sensitivity to expected demographic changes, understand the needs, and implement solutions around these needs. Policies to accelerate development, including programmes to improve reproductive health and to combat the **HIV/AIDS** epidemic, can greatly benefit **from** taking the complexity of biophysical, social, economic and institutional dimensions of demographic behaviour into **closer** consideration. The ambitious ideas of Cairo will be better served if **single-sectoral** approaches in developmental strategies are replaced by more integrated, **multi-sectoral efforts**. Only by doing this can effective solutions be developed.

The issue of improving the wellbeing of the human population necessitates close collaboration on many different levels. The UNFPA TSS system, in which agencies like FAO are partners, is an example of a particularly effective, multidisciplinary instrument for meeting some of the tasks that still remain in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action. We need to mobilize all our intellectual and organizational capacities to address effectively at the policy and **programme levels** the **linkages** between population **change, environment, transformation** of the economic **system**, and the shifts in social **norms** and **aspirations** of people.' During the five years **that have elapsed since** Cairo, **the nature of population** challenges has changed. The **increasing diversification** of **population issues** in **individual** countries requires new ways of thinking. The current stage of the **post-Cairo process** gives us a unique opportunity to identify the newly emerging issues and reconsider our **priorities**.