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STATEMENT BY

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Agenda item 4

General debate on national experience in population matters: contribution of the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development to the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

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Madam Chairperson, distinguished participants,

I would like to raise a few issues based on Finland's experiences and to look at these issues both from the individual's point of view as well as from the population and development perspective.

The programme of action of the International Conference on Population and Development has had a major impact on population, health and human rights policies, but achievements have been geographically uneven.

Population growth, associated with unsustainable production and consumption patterns, is threatening the carrying capacity of the earth. In many instances this can already be seen locally but also increasingly on the global scale. It is clear that fighting poverty and meeting the MDGs is difficult when population grows rapidly. Increasing the provision of services at the rate that can meet a rapid population growth rate is difficult, and has in some cases turned practically impossible e.g. in rapidly growing urban areas.

In turn, many features characteristic to poverty, such as lack of information, low status of women, high infant mortality, low level of education of children, poor health services, and lack of social protection tend to maintain high birth rates. Thus the relation of high population growth and poverty is a two-way impoverishing spiral.

It is however promising, that countries that have been able to reduce mortality through adequate investments in health care, access to services, education and the improvement of the status of women have also been able to develop their economies and reduce poverty. The history of Finland is an example on how investing in people, services and security for all can lead to the reduction of unbalanced population growth as well as the reduction of poverty.

Finland focused on gender equality, education for all, and health for all, already at the time when most of the population depended on small scale agriculture and the income levels were far below those of its neighbouring countries.

In current international comparisons, Finnish people enjoy good health according to many statistical indicators such as maternal and child mortality, abortion rates, number of sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancies.

Finland has been fairly successful in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights. Co-ordinated action and clear political commitment has helped in tackling these challenges, by means such as sex education, attention to youth and access to sexual and reproductive health services in local health care centres.

Madam chairperson,

Many mothers and fathers realize that too large a family leads to more poverty and the transmission of poverty to the next generation, their own children. At the family level there is a large unmet demand for effective means for choosing the right family size. This is where we need to put our extra efforts

We believe that most countries have realized the importance of managing major population changes. Every second government in low income countries has a population policy that aims at slowing down population growth. Most governments are also concerned about other crucial issues related to population structure and changes, such as age structure and regional distribution of their populations.

Finland has designed its development cooperation policy around the concept of sustainable development. Poverty can be overcome only if development is ecologically, economically and socially

sustainable. Managing population changes is a component of each of these dimensions of sustainable development.

Madam Chairperson

The Commission on Population and Development is a central forum where all countries can examine the population goals and means and their relation to human rights, particularly sexual and reproductive health and rights, and our common goal of sustainable development.

Finland considers this challenge to be a global one that calls for global and just solutions. The equation is not easy to solve. All countries are involved and all countries need to have an equal seat at the negotiation table. We look forward to continuing this important work.