

**Acceptance Statement of
Mr. Enrique Picado A.
On behalf of the Nicaraguan Communal Movement**

**2009 United Nations Population Award
1 June 2009**

Chairman of the Committee for the United Nations Population Award;

Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations;

Ms. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund;

Excellencies;

Members of the Committee for the United Nations Population Award;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Friends;

This afternoon, it is with great pride and satisfaction that we accept the 2009 United Nations Population Award on behalf of those who, due to the distance and obvious conditions, are unable to be with us, the members of the health brigades, outreach workers, midwives, volunteers, and community leaders, organized in the field and in the mountains, in valleys, towns, cities, and in our capital. This award, dear friends, belongs to these men and women.

This award also belongs to those volunteers, organized and motivated by other social movements like churches, youth movements, citizen action groups, women's movements, healthcare unions, maternal health clinics, teenage and youth centers, which promote human rights in Nicaragua, particularly, the right to health.

Ladies and gentlemen, we would also like to share this award with all of the world's social organizations that were nominated for the Award and like us, work for and shape the rights of population, day after day. To all of them, our best wishes. And our warm, friendly embrace to Professor Mahmoud Fahmy Fathalla.

The Nicaraguan Communal Movement is a civil, community-based organization that grew out of the population 31 years ago, on 9 September 1978, as an alternative for the support and protection of the lives of girls and boys, young people, adults, and pregnant women.

Thus, we were born with the commitment to life, justice, liberty, and the pursuit of our full human rights in the community. Our commitment, vocation, and conviction for the rights of the population, expressed in terms of development and a decent quality of life grew out of this.

In these three decades of determination and hard work, we have built the community health network made up of entrepreneurial and enthusiastic women and men, teens, young people, and adults. We have devoted all our effort, creativity, and imagination to making health everyone's cause, in a place where hope, commitment, and dreams come together in social volunteer involvement and mobilization: "THE COMMUNITY," based on the principles, values, and strategies of primary health care.

We are members of the People's Health Movement, an international social network promoting health from a human rights point of view. We believe that our struggle is also the struggle of many in the world, and therefore, human rights must be globalized and have no borders.

We contributed to eradicating the scourge of polio from our country in 1983. We have also contributed to reducing diseases that had a major impact on us, like whooping cough, malaria, and tetanus. We have strongly supported the reduction of child mortality, from 126 boys and girls per thousand live births to the current figure of 63.

We have worked tirelessly for child immunization and care for the health and life of women of child-bearing age; we contributed to eradicating rubella in 2006, all through the People's Health Conferences promoted by various governments and established as a successful mechanism for health, since 1979 by the Sandinista Revolution.

We are advocates, guardians, and artisans of preventive health. We are men and women of all ages, who like hardworking little ants organized in work groups, committees, youth clubs, and social networks, together with the organized population, sculpt work that we understand as life, wellbeing, community development, a healthy environment, and rights. That work is recognized in this award.

Our community-based health network is made up of more than 15,000 people, 60% young people and teens, and 70% women. It also includes about 800 community-based educators, and around 6,000 leaders, working hard every day to develop their communities.

This social work, dear colleagues, has now led to this 2009 Population Award, granted to the largest nationally led autonomous community-based organization in Nicaragua.

All that I have just said, however, is only the root. The tree itself, our award, germinated in 1994, when a light, the United Nations Population Fund, sent us its rays and energy in the form of new content, approaches, and work methodologies, specific to the duties, interests and rights of the community-based setting.

Since then, we have established a lasting alliance that, from our point of view, has borne unforeseen fruit for marginalized populations, groups living in extreme poverty or far from population centers, and poor rural areas, very specific to our developing countries. An alliance that put community-based sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights at the top of its agenda.

That same year was also the International Conference in Cairo, a global event that considerably enriched our experience and commitment to these issues. For us, this represented a watershed moment for our vision, strategies, and principles related to human rights, particularly those of women, young people, and teens.

It was difficult to take up these challenges. We depended primarily on plans and issues linked to preventive health and fighting epidemics from the government point of view. Our community-based agenda was an extension of the government agenda, valid, of course, but something was missing to establish our own work dynamics, community action, and brigade member network.

It was hard because these were issues linked to human rights. Not the human rights we had traditionally promoted and defended. They were and continue to be the human rights of women and men, teens, young people and adults, related to their sexuality at any age, and their reproduction, with full health and decision-making capabilities, taking into account their family, social, economic, environmental, and community settings. It was hard but full of passion for life and rights, hidden and averted through cloistered channels of oppression in individuals, homes, families, and communities.

A patriarchal and economic system of oppression that makes one see machismo as courage, the patriarchy as divine, women as the slaves of men, and thereby, of the home. A system that, at least in our poor countries, increases the vicious circle of poverty.

For these reasons, we adopted a solid strategy of community-based promotion and advocacy of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in more than 100 municipalities throughout the country. In just 10 municipalities, we had 500 communities organized, 5,000 health brigade members, and about 500 outreach workers, who work with the population and undertake small and large activities for their rights and against poverty.

This award, dear colleagues, is thus an effective contribution toward reducing maternal morbidity and mortality rates, and those of women in general in the community; it is the prevention of HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, which are now affecting more women and young people in our country; it is the fight against gender-based and domestic violence and the defense of the human rights of women from every point of view; it is the participation and the leading role played by teens and young people in their own rights; it is the reduction or eradication of teen pregnancy; it is the full involvement of the population in promoting their own health.

One extraordinary success was the building of our *Community-based Health Policy* with the full participation of all, based on our own experience, which has consolidated our vision and actions serving all dimensions of health: physical, psychological, environmental, social, and community health; while demanding that the State fulfill its responsibility by participating jointly and playing a leading role in prevention and the social construction of health, from a human rights perspective.

The strategies adopted have shown that, with resourcefulness, creativity, and respect, combining all our resources, we can do a great deal - the local assemblies, round table

discussions, door-to-door visits, peer communication between young people, for example, community festivals, empowerment processes, training, and communication.

The dynamics of social mobilization, institutional and citizen impact, and micro financing have been demonstrated to be effective ways to promote changes in government and in the community with purposeful participation, promoting culture, art, and popular knowledge.

It is very satisfying for us to have a solid strategy for alliances in the municipalities, primarily with the local governments, the Ministries of Health and Education, and nongovernmental organizations devoted to the population's human rights.

This award, the luxuriant, enduring tree of the Nicaraguan Communal Movement in our country, will bear many fruits. At this momentous event, we would like to express our firm commitment to the struggle for, and the promotion and defense of reproductive and sexual health and reproductive rights.

We will place emphasis on the human rights of women, prioritizing their right to life. We will strengthen our role in the fight against HIV and AIDS by organizing a community-based network for prevention, treatment, and solidarity. We will address domestic violence, and above all, we will promote greater involvement of the population for their human rights.

We have also adopted a strategy of volunteer blood donation with the Nicaraguan Red Cross. We are taking actions to adapt to and have an impact on climate change, within the framework of community-based risk management.

We also take actions in the areas of education, housing, a healthy environment, recreation, decent employment, social infrastructure projects, and in all of this we work like clever little ants from the Nicaraguan Communal Movement.

With the award in our hands and in our heart, far from our country and our native land, where our shouts of "VIVA" will resound like the wind and storms when they bring water and the planting season, and when the plants bear fruit, we say in this hall, and in this center of the nations and peoples of the world, "Long live the health brigade members! Long live the Nicaraguan Communal Movement! Long live Nicaragua!"

THANK YOU VERY MUCH...