



Dominican Republic

XXIX Special Session of the General Assembly on the
Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the
International Conference on Population and
Development Beyond 2014

Speech of his Excellency Andrés
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Relations

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ARRANGE WITH THE SPEAKER

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share some ideas and considerations with you. I would also like to extend our recognition to the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, for his leadership, as head of the United Nations.

We would like to express our appreciation of the Report of the Secretary-General, on the "Framework of Action for the Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development Beyond 2014". And also for the "Index Report on the interactive debate of the 47th session of the Commission on Population and Development".

Furthermore, we welcome the direction achieved in the Montevideo Consensus, which will contribute to designing the best possible national and regional road map to give continuity to the commitments of the Cairo Action Plan beyond 2014.

The adoption of the Cairo Action Plan in 1994 extended the framework of rights for individuals. In the Dominican Republic, it has influenced public policy and contributed to raising citizen awareness of issues related to human development.

It has had a significant impact, particularly on the Constitution of the Republic, reformed in 2010, and on the Vision 2030 of the National Development Strategy.

The truth is that if we wanted something to be the mark of this government in the Dominican Republic, it is precisely the idea of putting people at the heart of all our policies, an idea which is widely shared by this flagship Action Plan.

And it is certain that while challenges and obstacles remain to be overcome, the Dominican Republic has made considerable progress in this domain.

With regard to this, we would like to highlight the progress achieved in the overall standard of living of the population, as demonstrated by the Human Development Index, which has increased from 0.60 in 1994 to 0.70 in 2013. This represents an increase of 10 points over the course of the implementation period of the Cairo Action Plan.

And this is only the start, as we have taken on the commitment to invest in our people. 38 out of every 100 Dominicans are between 10 and 29 years old. We must do everything we can so that the country can take advantage of the great asset for development that the demographic dividend represents.

However, I must express our doubts about the methodology used for measuring poverty, which places the Dominican Republic among the upper middle income countries. The reality is that approximately one third of the population lives in unacceptable conditions.

Equally, we question the measurement of poverty based on income and the definition of poor families as those who live on less than two US dollars a day, and the extremely poor as those who live on less than 1.25 dollars a day, adjusted in both cases for purchasing power parity. In other words, just a few cents determine the difference between poverty and extreme poverty; between barely surviving and practically dying of hunger.

The optimism of the figures on poverty reduction throughout the world, based on these parameters, clashes directly with the widespread perception among the population that the figures for economic development, no matter how promising they may be, do not correspond to their expectations and actual living conditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Irrespective of this, the Government of the Dominican Republic and its society are firmly committed to eradicating poverty and the cycles of social exclusion and inequality. That is why we have opted for a society with universal access to healthcare and education.

In this respect, one fundamental objective is to reduce maternal and infant mortality. That is why we are making a

substantial investment in improving obstetrics and gynaecology units throughout the country. And we can confirm that today, nearly all registered births take place in hospital.

The outcome of the first year of this government initiative has been an 18 percent reduction in infant mortality; and a 4 percent reduction in maternal mortality. In the second year, this trend was consolidated with a 24 percent reduction in infant mortality and a 12 percent reduction in maternal mortality.

We are aware, however, that there is still much that needs to be done in the area of teenage pregnancy.

That is why we recently launched, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, the project "Addressing the General Health of Teenagers with an Emphasis on Reducing Pregnancy and Maternal Mortality". This is an example of how international collaboration can help to advance the achievement of the objectives of the ICPD.

Another example is the initiative which we launched in collaboration with the European Union at the start of this month, to assist our neighbour Haiti. Thanks to European aid, three hospitals will be built in the regions of Haiti that are closest to our border, to provide care for this particularly vulnerable population. These hospitals will focus on providing services for obstetrics and gynaecology, internal medicine, surgery and paediatrics.

The construction of these health centres will benefit both the Haitian patients who will no longer need to cross the border to seek services, and Haitian healthcare workers, who can work as specialists in their own country.

However, international aid is increasingly governed by the inadequate classifications which I have mentioned, masking painful realities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are convinced that education is one of the best ways to raise people's self-esteem and self-realisation, particularly young people.

Recently, the Dominican Republic signed a National Pact for High-Quality Education, which is also a pact for young people and their development, in accordance with the objectives of the Cairo Action Plan.

Our objective is that all Dominican children have a guaranteed right to high-quality education, through the implementation of inclusive public policies, such as extending the school day and making school meals universal.

In addition, the Government has launched the *Quisqueya Empieza Contigo* initiative (the nation begins with you), which will give an unprecedented boost to early years education and support for our children. Our goal is that thousands of children can break the cycle of poverty which condemns them from their early years to undernourishment and all manner of deprivation.

We have already launched a broad plan to construct children's and community centres in order to ensure that there is support and care for our little ones from the outset, as well as support for families in their childrearing needs.

Friends,

From Cairo to now, our country has also made progress in terms of living standards, the recognition of rights and respect for women. We have made rapid progress in improving the recognition of rights and respect for women, which have resulted in achievements in gender equality, in access to education at all levels, and significant improvements in equal employment opportunities for women.

However, we still have many areas to address in the work we are doing, including the eradication of gender-based violence, which continues to be a shameful blemish to which there can only be one response: zero tolerance.

This ends our brief assessment of the achievements made by our country with regard to the Cairo agenda, which is also our own. An agenda which puts people and their priorities first, that puts politics and economics at the

service of the people and not the other way round.

Please be assured that we will continue to work tirelessly to guarantee the rights of our population, improve their quality of life and achieve development based on respect, tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

Thank you very much