

Statement by the President of the General Assembly
To the twenty-first Special Session of the General Assembly for the
Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Program of Action
of the International Conference on Population and Development

United Nations, New York,
30 June 1999

(Heads of states and governments), Honorable Ministers, Honorable delegates.

This Special Session is convened at a double turning point in world history:

- We are on the brink of a new century and a new millennium; and
- We are poised to welcome the six billionth citizen of the world.

I use the word "welcome" advisedly: for what sort of a world would it be if we did not welcome a new arrival, if we did not celebrate the birth of an infant? Whoever and wherever this baby is born, we wish him or her well, we congratulate the parents, and we hope for health, prosperity and a long life for the newborn.

And indeed, as we pass six billion, there are some reasons to think that the new baby is more fortunate than his predecessors, born in 1930 -2 billion, in 1960 -3 billion; in 1974 -4 billion, or in 1987 -five billion. Infant mortality has never been lower; life expectancy has never been longer; there has never been so much wealth in the world, and never have so many people shared in it. Never have so many people been so well educated, well fed or well housed. Educational enrollment has

never been as high, particularly in Primary and Secondary Education. However despite all these advances, we do face serious problems of social integration and marginality that are embedded in cultural, political and economic factors. The inequality gap seems to increase in objective and subjective terms followed by a wide sense of deprivation.

Yet, as we know, there are also reasons for foreboding. We hope that Baby Six Billion will be able to take advantage of all these good things, all this progress; but of the-2100 babies **born during** the time it takes to make my statement this morning, 1995 will be born in the poorer countries of the world, and most likely into a poor family.

For these children, and their parents, the prospects are rather gloomy. As a group, developing countries' life expectancy is lower, infant mortality is higher and income is lower than in the industrialized countries and the income distribution is very unequal. For the least development countries, prospects are still bleaker.

We are here today in the interests of closing this gap, and to make a contribution to that **end**. Our concern, first and foremost, is for economic and social development, for all countries, on a basis of gender equity and equality, of human rights and social justice. We know all of us, that only by enduring sustained and sustainable development, and ensuring that all people can share in its benefits, can we secure in the next century the peace that has eluded the world during this one.

We do not have a sole and normative alternative to development. Thinking towards a more equal society do not imply an unique set of universal policies, but rather the recognition that we must develop a high sense of understanding towards different values and beliefs. We must be culturally orientated in facing problems of development, in this context, the population issue cannot be mechanically resolved under an universal and unique perspective but we must be carefully study the cultural and social setting of the new babies in different societies so as to promote a reliable and **sustainable strategy** of achieving certain goals. Prescription devoid of the study of the culture is not a good way of treating with a world society.

The General Assembly called a series of United Nations conferences in the 1990s, which have together addressed many of these problems. The recommendations of these conferences, taken together, offer the prospect of progress in many areas, notably in social development. Since the conferences, countries and the international community have been working together towards the goals they have agreed.

You have called this special session of the General Assembly to consider progress in one particular area, that of population and development. The International Conference on Population and Development 1994, attended by 179 member states, came to consensus on a Program of Action, which is both

comprehensive and particular. It sets out broad statements of principle; but it also makes specific recommendations for action.

The Program of Action begins by stating the fundamental understanding: that implementing its recommendations is the sovereign right of each country, consistent with national laws and development priorities, with full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural background of its people, and in conformity with universally recognized international human rights.

The 15 principles of the Program of Action are a very clear statement of the ground for consensus. They are as valid today as they were when you countries agreed them five years ago.

The Program of Action itself is the fruit of the discussion not merely of a few days during the ICPD, but of months and years before the Conference. It reflects the considered views of all member states involved in the process. The Program of Action has been extensively quoted and relied upon in the discussion leading up to this Special Session, and I am sure that it will prove equally reliable in the years ahead.

The ICPD, itself was the culmination of a long process of action and discussion, which may be said to have begun 25 years ago with the World Population Conference in Bucharest. Its roots go even further back, to the very beginning of the United Nations, when the Population Commission was set up and the United Nations

Population Division was set up to serve it. Action programs date from the beginning of UNFPA's operations thirty years ago, in 1969.

I mention this history only to show that population has deep roots in the United Nations system. Over the last quarter-century, through an exhaustive and inclusive process of dialogue and discussion, through action programs and international cooperation, population has become part of the global dialogue on economic and social development. It has become part of every country's thinking and planning. Action on population and development issues has changed the lives of our citizens for the better; it has strengthened not only individuals, but families, communities and nations.

To this end, the ICPD Program of action sets goals to be implemented within five, ten and 20 years in key areas of population and development: in reproductive health; in maternal and infant mortality; in life expectancy; in education; and specifically the gender gap in education; and, most crucially; in resources to help achieve these goal.

You have decided on this Special Session to review progress towards these goals and towards implementing the other recommendations made in the ICPD Program of Action. Our common aim is to build on what we agreed at the ICPD. We have years of experience behind us: it will all go into the discussions of the next few days.

In the years since 1994, countries have made excellent progress towards the ICPD goals. Policies have been reviewed and changed; new policies have been adopted. The legal framework has been examined and new laws passed to remove obstacles to implementation. There is more enthusiasm for enforcing existing constitutional and legal protections, notably in the area of gender equity and equality. Services have been reorganized and reformed. Existing partnerships between governments and civil society have been strengthened and new ones formed. Existing resource has been re-deployed and new resources have been found.

On all sides we find agreement on the underlying values of the ICPD Program of Action, experience of the practicality of its recommendations, and enthusiasm for the further implementation of its provisions.

There is discussion, as there should be, about the best way to proceed, while preserving and protecting the values and principles enshrined in the Program of Action.

In particular, there is discussion concerning the resources necessary for full implementation of the Program of Action. We know that all countries are challenged by the demands of development: but we also know that the agreements made at ICPD, at the Social Summit and at the Fourth World Conference on Women cannot be fully implemented without your full cooperation.

I therefore call on all countries to review their capabilities to provide resources for implementing the agreements of these conferences, but for all of humankind. Our Baby Six Billion deserves the best human family has to offer.

I welcome you to the United Nations, and I wish you every success in your discussions during the next few days.

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