

**International Parliamentarians' Conference on the  
Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action**

***Strasbourg, 18-19 October 2004***

**Opening remarks by the Secretary General of the Council  
of Europe**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**When I was elected to Parliament in the United Kingdom twenty five years ago, one of the first groups which I joined was the All Party Group for Population and Development, and I am delighted to see some of my friends in that Group taking part in this conference today. I am also delighted that one of my first engagements as the new Secretary General of the Council of Europe is to speak at this opening. I am only sorry that it will not possible for me to stay with you for as long as I would like.**

Perhaps I should explain that I had reserved the whole of today in my diary for your conference, but found last week that a meeting of experts to discuss the Council of Europe's contribution to the campaign against terrorism had been arranged for today. As I hope you will understand I must attend that meeting in view of what has happened in several member states of the Council of Europe in recent months so my absence from the rest of your proceedings should not be seen as a lack of interest in the issues which you are discussing or the results of your discussions – and I shall make a point of reading the record of this Conference as soon as it is available.

Because although the campaign against terrorism in Europe and elsewhere is urgent, it must not avoid the challenge of population growth in the

of population growth, it is also an issue of human rights. Let me say very clearly that for me access to family planning services is a human right. And, I might add, so is gender equality. Human rights are the *raison d'être* of the Council of Europe and that is why I am so pleased to be able to draw your attention to the way in which the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has tackled population and equality issues in recent years. I am sure that my colleague Marcel Glesener will have more to say about that. But it is not only the members of our Assembly who are concerned about these questions. The inter-governmental side has a history of organising debates about the policy implications of population trends. The European Population Committee brings together distinguished European demographers, who have

carried out a series of studies on the relationship between demographic trends and social cohesion. This work will culminate next April in a European Population Conference on the theme "*Demographic Challenges for Social Cohesion*".

This will be a unique opportunity for dialogue between scientists, policy-makers and parliamentarians on the implications of population trends for social policies.

As for the commitments agreed at the conference in Cairo ten years ago, you do not need me to tell you that although there has been some progress, it has not been enough.

As I have already said, I look forward to reading the results of your deliberations.