



94-09-09: Statement of Vanuatu, H.E. John Sethy Regenvanu

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AS WRITTEN

STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY

JOHN SETHY REGENVANU

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

MINISTER FOR JUSTICE, CULTURE, RELIGION AND

WOMENS' AFFAIRS

AT THE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON

POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

5 - 13 SEPTEMBER 1994

MR President

SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE,
YOUR EXCELLENCIES, THE HEADS OF STATES AND HEADS OF GOVERNMENTS
YOUR EXCELLENCIES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

ALLOW ME, ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF THE
REPUBLIC OF VANUATU, TO CONGRATULATE YOU ON YOUR ELECTION TO THE CHAIR
OF THIS IMPORTANT CONFERENCE.

I TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY, MR PRESIDENT, TO CONGRATULATE DR
NAFIS SADIK, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE FOR HER GUIDANCE
AND ADVICE DURING THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS DURING THE
THREE YEARS BUILT-UP TO THIS CONFERENCE. I ALSO JOIN THE PREVIOUS
SPEAKERS IN EXPRESSING MY DELEGATION'S APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE
TO THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF EGYPT FOR ACCEPTING TO HOST THIS
CONFERENCE AND FOR THE HOSPITALITY EXTENDED TO US.

MR PRESIDENT, THIS THIRD CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND
DEVELOPMENT IS FOR MANKIND ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON
COURSES OF ACTIONS, ON APPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS AND ON FINDING WAYS OF
FACING UP TO THE DISPROPORTIONATE AND ALARMING GROWTH OF THE
WORLD'S POPULATION.

MR PRESIDENT, I DO NOT WISH TO DWELL ON THE URGENCY OF THE
ISSUE, WHICH HAS BEEN MORE THAN ADEQUATELY HANDLED BY THE PREVIOUS

SPEAKERS. I SHALL, HOWEVER, LIKE TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC IN GENERAL, AND IN MY OWN COUNTRY THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU IN PARTICULAR.

ALTHOUGH OUR COUNTRIES MAY BE SMALL, (NOT TO SAY TINY IN GLOBAL TERMS), POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES ARE NO LESS REAL THERE. CONSCIOUS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CAIRO CONFERENCE, THE COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES OF THE PACIFIC CONVENED A MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN PORT VILA, VANUATU, IN SEPTEMBER 1993 THE THEME OF WHICH WAS "POPULATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BASED ON RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY. THE "PORT VILA DECLARATION", WHICH RESULTED FROM THAT CONFERENCE, SETS OUT OUR COMMON POSITION WITH REGARD TO POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE HERE THAT THIS DECLARATION DID NOT CONSIDER ABORTION AS A FAMILY PLANNING OPTION.

WITH DUE CONSIDERATION TO OUR TRADITIONAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY AND GIVEN THE ISSUE'S SENSITIVITY, A NUMBER OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES WERE ADOPTED. AMONGST THESE WERE THE FOLLOWING:

-SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT ARE ESSENTIAL FOR HUMAN BEINGS TO ENJOY A PRODUCTIVE AND HEALTHY LIFE ;

-POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS DIFFER FROM COUNTRY TO COUNTRY AND SOLUTIONS TO THESE MUST DEPEND ON AND BE FOUND WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE SPECIFIC SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC PRIORITIES AND NEEDS OF EACH COUNTRY AND TERRITORY.

-ACCESS TO SAFE AND EFFECTIVE FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES IS A

BASIC HUMAN RIGHT. ACCESS AND CHOICE OF A RANGE OF AFFORDABLE FAMILY PLANNING METHODS AND SERVICES MUST BE ASSURED FOR ALL, COERCION MUST PLAY NO PART IN POPULATION POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES ;

-POLITICAL COMMITMENT IS INDISPENSIBLE.

WE BELIEVE THAT IN ORDER FOR THIS CONFERENCE TO BE A SUCCESS, THE ACTION PROGRAMME SHOULD CONTAIN APPROPRIATE AND PRACTICABLE MEASURES WHICH ARE ACCEPTABLE AND COULD EASILY BE IMPLEMENTED.

MR PRESIDENT, VANUATU HAS APPROXIMATELY 150 000 PEOPLE. WITH A GROWTH RATE OF 2.8 %, WE WILL BE 350 000 IN 2010. THE URBAN POPULATION GROWTH RATE IS APPROXIMATELY 8% PER ANNUM.

BY THE END OF THE 1980's, THE GOVERNMENT ACKNOWLEDGED THE INADEQUATE ATTENTION GIVEN TO THE SIZE AND GROWTH OF VANUATU'S POPULATION. TO RECTIFY THE SITUATION, OUR THIRD NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (1992-1996) SPELT OUT THREE OBJECTIVES REGARDING POPULATION. THEY ARE:

- TO CREATE AWARENESS IN BOTH GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR OF THE INFLUENCE AND EFFECTS OF POPULATION CHANGE ON OVERALL SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT;
- TO INSTITUTIONALISE AN APPROPRIATE SYSTEM OF MONITORING THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF POPULATION WITHIN GOVERNMENT;
- TO PREPARE A PLAN OF ACTION WHICH WILL ENSURE AN EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF THE COUNTRY'S OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

AMONG URBAN AND RURAL POPULATIONS.

MR PRESIDENT, WE HAVE NOW COMPLETED OUR NATIONAL POPULATION POLICY WHICH IS AN ESSENTIAL TOOL IN ANY POSITIVE ACTION ON MATTERS RELATED TO POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT.

THE VANUATU GOVERNMENT HAS IDENTIFIED THREE MAJOR PRIORITY AREAS IN WHICH TO ADDRESS POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES. THESE ARE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE.

IN SO FAR AS HEALTH IS CONCERNED AND ALONG WITH ITS NORMAL SERVICE DELIVERY, FAMILY PLANNING HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF IT. AMONG THE OPTIONS AVAILABLE, DEPO PROVERA WAS THE MOST POPULAR CHOICE. IT WAS HOWEVER TEMPORARILY BANNED AND FAMILY PLANNING SUFFERED ACCORDINGLY. HOWEVER, IT HAS NOW BEEN RE-INTRODUCED AND IT IS THEREFORE ANTICIPATED THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF FAMILY PLANNING USERS WILL INCREASE FROM A CURRENT LOW OF AROUND 30 % TO AT LEAST 50 % WITHIN TWO YEARS.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS AND WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE FAMILY PLANNING INFORMATION AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TO AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, CHOICE IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THIS SHOULD BE EXERCISED WITHOUT COERCION. WE REGARD ABORTION AS A NON-OPTION FOR FAMILY PLANNING BUT SHOULD THIS BE NECESSARY THEN IT SHOULD AT LEAST BE SAFE AND WITHOUT UNDUE HARM TO THE MOTHER.

WE RECOGNISE THAT IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE STANDARD OF HEALTH AND OF LIVING, IN GENERAL, IT IS NECESSARY TO RAISE STANDARD OF EDUCATION. IN THIS REGARD THE GOVERNMENT HAS INTRODUCED FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION AND 50 % REDUCTION IN FEES LEVIED FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION.

IN SO FAR AS GENDER IS CONCERNED, VANUATU'S TRADITIONAL PRACTICES PRECLUDES WOMEN FROM BEING TRULY EQUAL WITH MEN. HOWEVER, THIS IS A TRADITION WHICH IS FAST DISAPPEARING ESPECIALLY AT WORK AND AT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. BOYS AND GIRLS ARE GIVEN EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AT SCHOOL AND THE OPTION TO CONTINUE DEPENDS MORE ON ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS AND THE PARENTS' ABILITY TO SUPPORT RATHER THAN ON ANY GENDER DISCRIMINATION. SIMILARLY, THERE IS INCREASE IN THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN VANUATU WORKFORCE AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE TO STRIVE NOT ONLY FOR GENDER EQUALITY BUT ALSO FOR GENDER QUALITY ESPECIALLY AT THE TOP MANAGEMENT LEVELS.

WHILST, VANUATU ENCOURAGES GENDER EQUALITY, THIS SHOULD NOT BE PERSUED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE FAMILY UNITY. VANUATU REGARDS THE UNITY OF THE FAMILY AS THE SMALLEST UNIT WHEREBY THE MOST INTIMATE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIP CAN BE EXPERIENCED AND HENCE THE FOCUS OF THIS CONFERENCE. THIS INCLUDES THE NUCLEAR FAMILY, THE CARE OF THE FAMILY'S ELDERLY, THE UNWANTED CHILDREN. THE ORPHANS AND EVEN CARE FOR THE SINGLE PARENTS. VANUATU SEES THIS AS BEING ESSENTIAL FOR MEANINGFUL ENDEAVORS.

MR PRESIDENT, THE SUCCESS OF OUR POPULATION POLICY AND OTHER PROGRAMMES WILL DEPEND TO SOME EXTENT ON THE ASSISTANCE OF OUR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS BOTH BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL. IT IS ENCOURAGING TO NOTE THIS WEEK THAT THERE HAS BEEN DEGREE OF COMMITMENT IN THIS REGARDS BY DONOR GOVERNMENTS AND AGENCIES.

MR PRESIDENT, THE GOVERNMENT RECOGNISES AND SUPPORTS THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE MEDIA IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION. ALSO TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED IS THE VALUE OF THE ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY

NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS' (NGO'S) IN HEALTH, FAMILY PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT IN GENERAL.

MR PRESIDENT, ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE YEAR 2000, MANKIND IS
FACED WITH A CONSIDERABLE CHALLENGE: HOW TO SLOW DOWN THE WORLD'S
GALLOPING POPULATION GROWTH WHILE AT THE SAME TIME MEETING THE CURRENT
POPULATION'S FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS. I AM CONFIDENT HOWEVER THAT IF WE THE
WORLD COMMUNITY LIVE UP TO THE COMMITMENT WE HAVE MADE IN THIS
CONFERENCE BY TRANSLATING THE PROVISION OF THE DRAFT PROGRAMME OF ACTION
INTO ACTION, WE CAN DELIVER A BETTER WORLD FOR OUR CHILDREN TOMOROW.
COOPERATION AMONGST US ALL IS ESSENTIAL IN THIS REGARD.

IN CONCLUSION, MR PRESIDENT, I WISH TO RE-ITERATE THE
FOLLOWING:

- VANUATU SUPPORTS THE CURRENT DRAFT PROGRAMME OF ACTION.
- WE ENCOURAGE GENDER EQUALITY AND QUALITY.
- AND FINALLY VANUATU IS COMMITTED TO INCREASE AVAILABILITY
AND ACCESSIBILITY TO HEALTH CARE INCLUDING FAMILY PLANNING.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

For further information, please contact: popin@undp.org
POPIN Gopher site: <gopher://gopher.undp.org/11/ungophers/popin>
POPIN WWW site: <http://www.undp.org/popin>