

Statement to the Hague Forum 8-12 February 1999

As written

THE REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

**FIVE YEAR-REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT.
HAGUE, 7-12 FEBRUARY 1999.**

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH DECLARATION

RWA
ST/42
DHG.99-70

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear participants,

It is an honour for me and for my country Rwanda to be present in this Hague Forum aiming at assessing progress made since the Cairo Conference on population and development, held five years ago, so as to come up with perspective actions for the coming century.

On behalf of my Country, my delegation and myself, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for the efforts made to get this Conference happen and I thank the Netherlands government for hosting it.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe you remember that the Cairo Conference was held immediately after the genocide of over a million of rwandese people. Therefore, I would like to remind the present audience on the effects of that tragedy which heavily affected all sectors of life in Rwanda such as :

- moral and physical suffering of survivors ;
- exile of over 3 million people who massively returned in 1996 ;
- massive destruction of socio-economic infrastructures, all that leading to desintegration of the social fabric of the rwandese society.

In the aftermath of genocide, the Government of National Unity, despite its limited resources and this post-genocide context, has put in place a programme aiming at addressing the population issues affecting Rwanda since over three decades,

In fact, the fertility rate in Rwanda (6,5 children per woman in 1996) is one of the highest in the world. It implies a rapid population growth (2,8% per annum in 1996) so that various strategies to alleviate poverty are not successful. Today GDP for Rwanda is one of the lowest in the world (250 US\$ in 1998). So, improvement is yet to be expected since people who survived the genocide feel that they have the challenge to replace those who perished.

As regard to this challenge, our approach is mainly centered on :

- improvement of the reproductive health taking into account information and education ;
- Awareness raising within our population to work hard and to increase production so as to help themselves becoming self sufficient at least for the basic needs and therefore improving the quality of life, which is to be a key factor towards behaviour change.

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Rwandese women have been victims of various aspects of discrimination for over decades with consequences such as :

- Low access to basic health services with a high maternal mortality rate of 800 per 100.000 live births in 1996 ;

- Low access to education (58% of rwandese women are illiterate);
- Low access to various resources in land particular, because of traditions which refrain women from inheriting land property while currently 34% of households heads in Rwanda are women.

Above all that, sexual violence during the genocide has affected a large number of young girls and women since it was used by genocide perpetrators as a weapon.

But allow me, distinguished guests to express our satisfaction for the efforts made by our government of national unity towards the on going process of eradication of all kinds of discrimination identified within the rwandese society through legal reforms, women economic empowerment, capacity building and establishment of women organisational structures at the grassroot levels. Yet, the law on succession, matrimonial regimes and liberalities is passing through parliament soon.

The socio-economic future of Rwanda lies on the 60% of its population made of youth under 20 years of age (1996), but faced with limited access to social-services.

In fact, over 40% of rwandese children do not have access to education ; infant mortality and that of children under five years remain high, respectively 131 and 203 per 1000 live births.

Nearly 400.000 rwandese children are orphans, 20% among them are heads of households.

It is in that context that specific programmes related to education, sexual health for youth have been initiated in order to help them to fullfill their role in the reconstruction of the Rwandese Society.

However , there is a big challenge facing rwandese people today : It is HIV/AIDS pandemic with 11% prevalence increasing rate within the general population.

To address this issue, a vigorous AIDS control programme has been put in place. It is focussed on prevention and based on strategies and lessons learnt from our neighbouring countries where results are quite satisfactory in this particular field. On the other hand a regional approach in this struggle is expected to be of immense benefit for our people.

The countries involved in this concerted regional effort are : Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Rwanda.

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since 1990 to date, massive displacement of our population within and outside the country has been one of the various consequences of the genocide and at the same time an obstacle to the security of the country.

But despite all that, Rwanda is proud of the rapatriation and ressettlement for more than four million of Rwandese citizens and among them more than 1 .000.000 were in exile for over three decades.

The national reconciliation programme in process is enhancing encouraging results.

Two national commissions ; one for human rights and the other one for the national reconciliation have been put in place to reinforce the programme.

However, our country's efforts are more and more reduced by the war situation in the great Lakes Region and this enormously affects the security of our country and that of our population.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Education and Training are the pillars of our government programme since over 48% of rwandese people are illiterate .

Education related to population issues is now integrated in our training programmes at all levels whereby science and technology are expected to be the most important components of the new education system in Rwanda.

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our population policy is being revised, based on the recommendations of the CAIRO action programme of, while taking into consideration the new context in the country.

In this ongoing process, the civil society and NGO'S which play a more and more important role in the implementation of the population programmes and

policies have been associated. But the major constraint remains insufficient resources both human and financial.

It is in this context that I call upon all our partners both bilateral and multilateral to make additional efforts in order to provide more assistance for the next coming five years ; this need is crucial for the whole world in general and particularly for African countries.

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude, allow me to thank UNFPA once again, on behalf of my government and myself for having organised this review of the Cairo action programme.

I believe this forum will help us to assess the impact of actions so far taken so as to draw lessons and experiences for the future plan aimed to address outstanding challenges on populations issues.

I also thank once again **THE NETHERLANDS government** for the hospitality of the people in this country.

I would like, at this occasion, to express to the international community the gratitude of the government and the people of Rwanda for its assistance for the last five years so as to rebuild hope and life of our people chaken by genocide.

I thank you all.