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Keynote Address

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most pleased to be with you today at the opening of this very important gathering of Parliamentarians from all over the world, to discuss the issues of population and development on the eve of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). I would like first of all to extend my sincere appreciation to our hosts, the Speaker of the Shoura Council, His Honourable Dr. Moustafa Kamal Helmy and His Excellency Minister Maher Mahran. I wish also to thank and congratulate the Honourable Mr. Shin Sakurai, the Chairman of the Steering Committee for the International Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, and his colleagues on the Con-mmittee, for their hard work in organizing this important gathering.

Today's conference is testimony to the long tradition of organized parliamentary interest and action in the field of population and development. The first International Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development met in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from 28 August to 1 September 1979. It called on parliamentarians everywhere to organize regional meetings to exchange information and experiences on population and development.

The response to this call was overwhelming-- first in Beijing in 1981; then in Brasilia a year later. New Delhi, Tunis and London held meetings in 1984, and Harare was the site for an all-Africa parliamentary conference in 1986.

Over the next two days, you will discuss and debate some of the key

issues in our quest for a balance between human numbers and available resources, including family planning and reproductive health, the empowerment of women, and international cooperation, among others. Many of these issues are central to the ICPD Programme of Action that is expected to emanate from the Cairo Conference. Parliamentarians have a crucial role in all aspects of the ICPD process and in particular in its follow-up. The outcomes of your Conference are therefore of great importance. When the ICPD is officially opened on Monday by His Excellency President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, it will represent the culmination of an extensive preparatory process that started three years ago with the first Preparatory Committee meeting in 1991. The results of all these collective contributions, views, opinions, including those of parliamentarians, have been brought together in a comprehensive and forward-looking draft Programme of Action, which will be finalized during the next one-and-a-half weeks.

In the two days ahead, you will discuss the most important themes in the draft Programme of Action, namely, population and its interrelationships to other aspects of sustainable development, reproductive health and family planning, empowerment of women, the imperative to reduce mortality rates in developing countries, and the issue of financial resources and finding ways to mobilize the resources required to implement the Programme of Action. I am happy that you will also take up the issue of the roles that you, as parliamentarians, will have in the implementation and monitoring of the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action. The organized parliamentary movement contributed greatly to the International Conference on Population in 1984, most importantly by encouraging parliamentarians to participate in their national delegations. From the sheer size and stature of the turn-out

for this conference, I know it will do so again-- with even greater impact.

An Integrated Approach to Population and Development

Population policy is broader than family planning. It must be part of a holistic development approach as emphasized in the draft Programme of Action. This approach recognizes that population programmes are an essential part of a range of actions and policies needed for sustainable development, including economic growth, poverty alleviation and environmental protection. In particular the Programme of Action gives greater attention to human investment through better health care and better education, especially for girls and women; and in general more attention to improving the role and the status of women and increasing their ability to make their own choices regarding their lives.

Reproductive health and family planning

At PrepCom 111, in April of this year, over 90 per cent of the countries represented agreed that family planning should be provided as part of the broader framework of reproductive health care that goes well beyond family planning. It is a comprehensive approach, addressing the overall health and well-being of individuals, especially women and girls, and aimed at increasing the scope of their choices.

According to the ICPD document, the cornerstone of reproductive health is the recognition of the basic human right of all couples and

individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children, and to have the information and means to do so. Much controversy and debate has arisen over the issue of abortion, as you know. Let me make it clear once and for all: contrary to what others might want you to believe, the ICPD draft Programme of Action does not advocate, nor promote, abortion -- let alone abortion on demand. Instead, the Programme of Action emphasizes reduction of the need for abortion by providing reproductive health services, including family planning. What it does advocate is that all parties concerned deal openly and forthrightly with abortion as a major public health concern for women. It also makes clear that women should have access to services for the management of complications arising from unsafe abortions. From a moral and ethical point of view, who can be against that

Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

With regard to the second topic, it is also agreed by all governments that in order to achieve sustainable development for all men and women, the status of women must be improved. It is especially important to ensure that women are able to fully participate at all levels of society. For too long, women have been denied the same rights and opportunities as men. As a direct result, women's health and well-being have been jeopardized and the whole development process has been held back. Thus the ICPD Programme of Action recognizes the improvement of the role and status of women as an important end in itself. The support of men is essential in order to achieve this goal.

Thanks to the efforts of many PrepCom 111 delegations, the current draft of Chapter 4 on gender equality is considered the most forward-looking ever to come out of a UN Conference.

Health and Mortality

Nowhere in the world is the gap between the rich and poor countries more obvious than with regard to the basic health and mortality indicators. The analysis, carried out by the ICPD Secretariat, of the national reports that have been submitted for the ICPD reiterated what others have also found -- that the gap between the industrialized countries of the North and the developing countries of the South has widened over the last two decades. For instance, infant mortality rates in developing countries are currently seven times higher than those in the industrialized world, while in the early 1970s they were five times higher. And the gap in maternal mortality rates is even more appalling. The lifetime risk for women of dying from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes is 1 in 20 in developing countries, compared to 1 in 10,000 in some developed countries.

Since millions of infants, children and women die every year of preventable and treatable illnesses and complications -an estimated half a million women die each year of pregnancy-related causes alone -the draft Programme of Action places great importance on the role of primary health care services in further reducing morbidity and mortality. I am very pleased that the draft Programme of Action contains three 20-year goals related to the reduction of infant, child and maternal mortality. It will commit the international community to tackle these grave

inequalities in health conditions between developed and developing countries as well as within countries. Despite the fact that the concept of 'safe motherhood', which is so essential in bringing down the rates of maternal mortality, has been placed between brackets, it is my sincere hope that the government delegations can work this out next week and will make safe motherhood a cornerstone of the Programme of Action.

Resource Mobilization

Finally, let us be realistic. We can have beautiful plans and emotional statements, but in the end it all comes down to the availability of resources -- human, institutional and financial -- to make things happen. The ICPD draft Programme of Action estimates the required financial resources for a comprehensive package of reproductive health care and family planning services, programmes for the prevention of STDs/HIV/AIDS and population data collection, analysis and dissemination, up till the year 2015. It appears that the total costs are very modest, some say even cheap. The costs per capita in the developing world for the provision of the full package is estimated to be US\$ 3.50 in the year 2000 and US\$ 3.70 in 2015.

Clearly if the Conference objectives are to be met, the resources committed to population and development programmes will have to increase substantially. The developing countries themselves will continue to provide, on average, two thirds of the resources needed, but the international community will have to increase its assistance to cover up to one third of the costs.

There is a strong international consensus on the need to mobilize significant additional financial resources from both the international community and within countries, and several countries have already announced that they will substantially increase their support, including the United States, Japan and the United Kingdom. I am confident, therefore, that the Conference will be able to reach general agreement on the amount of resources needed and how to mobilize the resources.

The Role of Parliamentarians

As parliamentarians, you will continue to play an important role in the follow-up of the ICPD and in building a consensus for the implementation of the Programme of Action that hopefully will be adopted.

On numerous occasions in the past three years, I have stressed the invaluable function that you, as representatives of the people, have in bridging Governments' activities and people's perception. You therefore are in a unique position to facilitate the implementation of, and monitoring the goals and objectives of, the draft Programme of Action. Following the Cairo Conference, parliamentarians should undertake at least four major tasks in the field of population and development:

- First, to increase awareness among the general public about the relationships between population and sustainable development;
- Second, to mobilize national support for the allocation of resources from

population and development programmes;

- Third, to prepare and enact legislation that enables Governments to implement the actions and recommendations of the Programme of Action;

- And fourth, and perhaps most important, to create or improve parliamentary mechanisms to ensure that follow up activities are undertaken in accordance with the Programme of Action.

All these aspects have been included in the draft Programme of Action.

I look forward to the important outcomes of your deliberations. The Declaration you will adopt will be, I am sure, of significant support to the debate next week and a guideline for future parliamentary action. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the key role that each one of you has played in mobilizing support for the ICPD and for, translating the international consensus into effective national action.

I wish your Conference every success. Thank you very much.

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