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Statement by H.E. Mr. Albert Gore
 Vice-President of the United States of America

Good morning. I am honored to join you as we begin one of the most
 important conferences ever held.

On behalf of President Clinton and the people of the United
 States, I would like to first of all express my thanks and appreciation
 to our host! President Mubarak. His leadership has been marked by a
 continuing commitment to building a better future for his people, this
 region and the world. This conference is dedicated to help achieve the
 same ends. I can think of no better or more fitting setting than Cairo
 for the work we begin today.

I would also like to thank Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali and Dr. Nafis Sadik for their inspired leadership in shepherding this conference from a concept to a reality. Allow me to also thank Prime minister Brundtland and Prime Minister Bhutto for their leadership and their contributions to the world's efforts to deal with this vital issue.

Most importantly, I want to acknowledge the enormous contributions of government officials non-governmental organization representatives, and private citizens toward addressing one of the greatest challenges -- and greatest opportunities -- of the coming century. We owe all of you who have been involved in this process a debt of gratitude.

We would not be here today if we were not convinced that the rapid and unsustainable growth of human population was an issue of the utmost urgency. It took 10,000 generations for the world's population to reach two billion people. Yet over the past 50 years, we have gone from two billion to more than five and a half billion. And we are on a path to increase to nine or 10 billion over the next 50 years. Ten thousand generations to reach two billion and then in one human lifetime -- ours -- we leap from two billion toward 10 billion.

These numbers are not by themselves the problem . But the startlingly new pattern they delineate is a symptom of a much larger and deeper spiritual challenge now facing humankind. Will we acknowledge our connections to one another or not? Will we accept responsibility for the consequences of the choices we make or not? Can we find ways to work together or will we insist on selfishly exploring the limits of human pride? How can we come to see in the faces of others our own hopes and

dreams for the future? Why is it so hard to recognize that we are all part of something larger than ourselves?

Of course these are timeless questions that have always characterized the human condition. But they now have a new urgency precisely because we have reached a new stage of human history -- a stage defined not just by the meteoric growth in human numbers but also by the unprecedented Faustian powers of the new technologies we have acquired during these same 50 years -- technologies which not only bring us new benefits but also magnify the consequences of age-old behaviors to extremes that all too often exceed the wisdom we bring to our decisions to use them.

For example, warfare is an ancient human habit -- but the invention of nuclear weapons so radically altered the consequences of this behavior that we were forced to find new ways of thinking about the relationship between nuclear states in order to avoid the use of these weapons. Similarly, the oceans have always been a source of food, but new technologies like 40-mile long driftnets coupled with sophisticated sonar equipment to precisely locate fish have severely depleted or seriously distressed every ocean fishery on our planet. Thus, we have begun to curtail the use of driftnets.

But it is becoming increasingly clear that our margin for error is shrinking as the rapid growth of population is combined with huge and unsustainable levels of consumption in the developed countries, powerful new tools for exploiting the earth and each other and a willful refusal to take responsibility for the future consequences of the choices we make.

Economically, rapid population growth often contributes to the

challenge of addressing persistent low wages, poverty and economic disparity.

Population trends also challenge the ability of societies, economies and governments to make the investments they need in both human capital and infrastructure.

At the level of the family, demographic trends have kept the world's investment in its children -- especially girls -- unacceptably low.

For individuals, population growth and high fertility are closely linked to the poor health and diminished opportunities of millions upon millions of women, infants and children and population pressures often put strains on hopes for stability at the national and international level. Look, for example at the 20 million refugees in our world who have no homes. The delegates to this conference have helped to create a widely shared understanding of these new realities. But what is truly remarkable about this conference is not only the unprecedented degree of consensus about the nature of the problem, but the degree of consensus about the nature of the solution.

A real change has occurred during the last several years in the way most people in the world look at and understand this problem. And the change is part of a larger philosophical shift in the way most people have begun to think about many large problems. There used to be an automatic tendency -- especially in the developed world -- to think about the process of change in terms of single causes producing single effects. And thus, when searching for the way to solve a particular problem, however large, it seemed natural enough to search for the

single most prominent "cause" of the problem and then address it forcefully. many divisive arguments resulted between groups advocating the selection of different causes as the "primary" culprit deserving of full attention.

Thus, when it became clear that new medical technologies were bringing dramatic declines in death rates but not in birth rates many pioneers in the effort to address the population question settled on the notion that the lack of contraceptives was the primary problem and argued that making them widely available everywhere would produce the effect we desired -- the completion of the demographic transition with the achievement of low birth rates as well as low death rates.

But as it became clear that contraception alone seldom led to the change nations were seeking to bring about, other single causes were afforded primary attention.

For example in the historic Bucharest conference 20 years ago, when thoughtful people noticed that most of the societies which had stabilized their population growth were wealthy, industrial and "developed", it seemed logical to conclude -- in the phrase common at the time -- "development is the best contraceptive."

Meanwhile, some insights from developing countries were given insufficient attention. For example some African leaders were arguing 30 years ago that "the most powerful contraceptive in the world is the confidence of parents that their children will survive."

And in places like Karen, in southwestern India, local leaders were making economic development more accessible by giving women as well as men access to education and high levels of literacy, while at the

same time providing good child and maternal health care as well as widespread access to contraception. And in the process they found that their population growth rate fell to nearly zero.

The world has also learned from developing countries that the wrong kind of rapid economic development -- the kind that is inequitable and destructive of traditional culture, the environment and human dignity -- can lead to the disorientation of society and a lessened ability to solve all problems -- including population. But here, at Cairo, there is a new and very widely shared consensus that no single one of these solutions is likely to be sufficient by itself to produce the pattern of change we are seeking. However, we also now agree that all of them together, when simultaneously present for a sufficient length of time, will reliably bring about a systemic change to low birth and death rates and a stabilized population. In this new consensus, equitable and sustainable development and population stabilization go together. The education and empowerment of women, high levels of literacy, the availability of contraception and quality health care: these factors are all crucial.

They cannot be put off until development takes place; they must accompany it -- and indeed should be seen as part of the process by which development is hastened and made more likely.

This holistic understanding is representative of the approach we must take in addressing other problems that cry out for attention. Recognizing connections and interrelationships is one of the keys. For example, the future of developed countries is connected to the prospects of developing countries. It is partly for this reason that we in the United States wish to choose this occasion to affirm unequivocally all

human rights! including the right to development. Let us be clear in acknowledging that persistent high levels of poverty in our world represent a principal cause of human suffering, environmental degradation instability -and rapid population growth.

But the solution -- like the solution to the population challenge will not be found in any single simplistic answer. It will be found in a comprehensive approach that combines democracy, economic reform, low rates of inflation, low levels of corruption, sound environmental stewardship, free and open markets at home and access to markets in the developed countries.

We must also acknowledge-- in developed and developing countries alike the connection between those of us alive today and the future generations that will inherit the results of the decisions we make. indeed, a major part of the spiritual crisis we face in the modern world is rooted in our obstinate refusal to look beyond the immediacy of our own needs and wants and instead invest in the kind of future our children's children have a right to expect. And it should be obvious that we cannot solve this lost sense of connection to our future merely through appeals to reason and logic.

Personally, I am convinced that the holistic solution we must seek is one that is rooted in faith and a commitment to basic human values of the kind enshrined in all of our major religious traditions and principles increasingly shared by men and women all around the world:

The central role of the family.

The importance of community.

The freedom of the human spirit.

The inherent dignity of every individual woman, man and child on this planet.

political, economic and religious freedom.

universal and inalienable human rights.

Will we draw upon the richness of these shared principles and values as we embark on our efforts today, or will we allow ourselves to be divided by our differences. And there are, of course, differences that will be extremely difficult to ever fully resolve.

For example, we are all well aware that views about abortion are as diverse among nations as among individuals. I want to be clear about the U.S. position on abortion so that there is no misunderstanding. We believe that making available the highest quality family planning and health care services will simultaneously respect women's own desires to prevent unintended pregnancies, reduce population growth and the rate of abortion.

The United States Constitution guarantees every woman within our borders a right to choose an abortion, subject to limited and specific exceptions. We are committed to that principle. But let us take a false issue off the table: the United States does not seek to establish a new international right to abortion, and we do not believe that abortion should be encouraged as a method of family planning.

We also believe that policy making in these matters should be the province of each government, within the context of its own laws and national circumstances, and consistent with previously agreed human rights standards

In this context, we abhor and condemn coercion related to abortion or any other matters of reproduction.

We believe that where abortion is permitted, it should be medically safe and that unsafe abortion is a matter of women's health that must be addressed.

But as we acknowledge the few areas where full agreement among us is more difficult, let us strengthen our resolve to respect our differences and reach past them to create what the world might remember as the "spirit of Cairo" -- a shared and unshakable determination to lay the foundation for a future of hope and promise.

This is the opening session. Each of us can play a crucial role in ensuring the success of this historic endeavor. The essential ingredient we all must bring to it is our commitment to make it work.

The Scottish mountain climber W.H. Murray wrote early in this century:

"Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative...there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too."

I saw this truth in operation earlier this year at the southern end of this continent when I represented my country at the inauguration of Nelson Mandela.

As he raised his hand to take the oath, I suddenly remembered a Sunday morning four years earlier when he was released from prison and my youngest child, then seven, joined me to watch live television coverage of the event and asked why the entire world was watching this person regain his freedom , .When I explained as best I could my son again asked "Why" After a series of "why", I began to feel frustrated -- but I suddenly realized what a rare privilege it was to explain to a child the existence of such an extraordinary positive event when I, like other parents, had so often been confronted with the burden of explaining to my children the existence of evil and terrible tragedies and injustices in our world.

So as President Mandela completed his oath, I resolved that I would spend the next several days in South Africa trying to understand how this wonderful development had occurred.

And what I found -- in addition to the well-known courage and vision of both Mandela and DeKlerk -- was the key ingredient that had not received emphasis in the news coverage: ordinary men and women of all ethnic backgrounds and all walks of life quietly had made up their minds that they were going to reach across the barriers that divided them and join hands to create a future much brighter than any they had been told was possible to even imagine.

We here today have the same choice and the same opportunity: will we give to our children's children the burden of explaining to their

children the reason why unspeakable tragedies that could have been avoided occur in their lives?

Or will we give them the privilege and joy of explaining the occurrence of unusually positive developments -- the foundations for which were laid here at this place in this time? The choice is ours. Let us resolve to make it well.

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