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Statement by Deputy Prime Minister, Prof. dr. Ivica Kostovic,

Head of Delegation of the Republic of Croatia

Cairo, 6 September 1994

ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA,

DR IVICA KOSTOVIC, AT THE CAIRO CONFERENCE ON DEMOGRAPHY

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the first time that the Republic of Croatia, as an

independent, sovereign and democratic country, is taking part in the Conference on Demography. This will also be the first time that Croatia can present to the international community the demographic problems it has been faced with as well as presenting questions in regard to the development of these problems. The National Committee established by the Government of the Republic of Croatia to prepare for this important conference was drawn up from the national report submitted to the member states of the United Nations during the last meeting of the Preparatory Committee in New York in April.

Here I shall briefly refer to the most important issues that, according to my government's view, are the primary obstacles to the development and well-being of people worldwide, and also in Croatia.

Mr. Chairman,

Presently there are approximately seventy war-ridden regions throughout the world which are the cause of human suffering. Despite the efforts of the international community to prevent conflicts and preserve global peace, we as a community are witnessing, on the one hand, the violation of jointly adopted decisions, and the lack of political will to implement these decisions on the other. Croatia is a vivid example of what the violation of fundamental principles means for the development of a sovereign country. The Republic of Croatia is therefore committed to the strengthening of all international mechanisms for the worldwide preservation of peace and the consistent implementation of decisions made by the international community. Peace is the basic prerequisite for the well-being of every person and the development of the community in which a person lives.

Mr. Chairman,

One of the most serious consequences of these conflicts is the humanitarian crisis that in some cases has assumed disastrous proportions. For example, at this very moment the world is faced with approximately twenty million refugees and displaced persons, and the Republic of Croatia is carrying a disproportionate burden of this world refugee crisis. Presently, Croatia has assumed responsibility for 379,908 refugees and displaced persons, whose basic needs include food, health care and accommodation; the prolongation of a search for a solution to the issues in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the occupied area of Croatia compounds this figure on a daily basis. The number of refugees and displaced persons is at a critical level of almost ten Percent of the total population of the Republic of Croatia. Taking into account Croatia's capabilities and its intent to create the foundations for further economic development, this unequivocally surmounts to a disproportionate burden for the republic. In 1993, Croatia took care of three Percent of the world's refugees, while at the same time its population made up less than one tenth of one single Percent. The active involvement of the international community in resolving the problem of displaced persons and refugees must begin with a determined effort to eliminate the cause of the crisis. The enormous degree of international solidarity and large amount of aid supplied to the Republic of Croatia can only alleviate the consequences of the crisis; unfortunately, it has hitherto done little to eliminate its causes. We therefore welcome the provisions of the final document that especially stress the displaced persons' and refugees' right to return home, and the determination of the international community to help them achieve this.

Mr. Chairman,

Albeit unfavorable prior to this conflict, the war has affected all areas of natural development for the population of the Republic of Croatia, with anticipated negative effects on future demographic processes. The main characteristics of population development in Croatia during the last three decades has been the continuous decline in population figures due to a decreasing birth-rate. Due to the war, in 1991 and 1992 the birth-rate gave way to declining population figures; in 1992, birth rate was reduced to 9.8 per mille the death rate increased to 10.8 per mille and negative growth figures, which had already appeared in 1991, were increased to 1.0 per mille in 1992 (in other words, registered deaths outnumbered births by 4,830 souls). The total fertility rate, which over the past two and a half decades had already fallen below the average level of merely reproducing the population (the average given is 2.1 children per woman in her childbearing years), was considerably lower in 1991 (1.54 children per woman in her childbearing years). Thus the process of depopulation which was present in the 1980s, was further aggravated by the war.

Depopulation in Croatia has also been spurred by the negative long-term migration balance, especially in regard to young educated people, which has now been compounded by the refugee crisis. It should be stressed that the most tragic consequence of the war in Croatia are 15,000 killed and missing persons, most of whom are civilians, and more than 6,000 people physically and mentally abused in detention camps. It should also be reiterated that almost four million people in the region have in one way or another been affected by the war and therefore require international aid.

This war introduced a new word to demographic terminology: ethnic cleansing. The term means a planned strategy of terror and violence,

including arbitrary killings and the harassment of people into leaving their homes with a view of creating nationally homogenous territories.

Mr. Chairman,

We believe that the provisions of this document regarding countries in transition are of great importance. Due to insufficient professional and material resources, countries which are undergoing radical changes in their political and economic systems, and are turning toward democratic processes and a market economy, will not be able to successfully conclude these processes without the support of the international community.

Mr. Chairman,

The objectives before us can only be achieved through mutual effort, with the United Nations playing the prominent role. It should be noted that these objectives can only be achieved by exercising the political will to jointly respect adopted decisions, especially those concerning the preservation of peace and security in the world. As I have already pointed out, the Republic of Croatia considers this as both the basic prerequisite and starting point for any development.

My delegation is prepared to contribute fully to the achieving of these objectives.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.