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Speech by

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My hearty congratulations to you, Your Excellency Mr. President on your election as the President of the International Conference on Population and Development. I also convey my felicitations to the Vice Presidents and Chairpersons of the various Committees on their election. I and my delegation are extremely happy to participate in the Conference in the historic city Cairo on the land of ancient civilization. We are grateful to His Excellency President Mubarak and the people of Egypt for their kind support to this Conference. We thank His Excellency Mr. Boutros Boutros Ghali, UN Secretary General for his kind address. We admire Mrs. Nafis Sadik and her team for their hard work in the preparation of this Conference and we thank them all.

We are meeting at a crucial moment of history of mankind. It is just six summers when we will be stepping into the next millennium. The world is witnessing unprecedented turmoil shaking the very foundations of the political, economic and social structures. Massive reorganization of human society is taking place and the barriers that keep different societies .apart.are breaking down. The continued world economic crisis has led to growing unemployment, continued inflation, recession and collapse of developing process in many countries and it has further aggravated the political and economic imbalances

In spite of the immense knowledge available to mankind through technological innovations and ability to improve health and human development, millions have remained under-nourished and are denied immediate needs of food, clothing, shelter, medical care and education, Distortions in the development of world economy have brought about a queer situation of over abundance, on the one side and deprivation on

the other.

The global economic crisis has hit the economies of many developing countries resulting in substantial cuts in health budgets, disintegration of rural health services and shortages of drugs and medical equipment. Whereas billions of dollars are being spent to produce newer generations of weapons of mass destruction capable of annihilating all traces of life on earth. The annual global military expenditure is around a trillion dollars. If only a small percentage of this wasteful and destructive expenditure could be diverted to the needs of health and human development, millions of people could be made healthier and happier.

Among the important changes in the global scenario, there have been significant achievements, and also avoidable failures. Though life expectancy has continued to increase and infant mortality continues to decline the level of morbidity and mortality, particularly mortality child mortality, continues to be high in many developing countries. The progressive health status worldwide has widened the gulf between the rich and the poor nations. Control of several communicable diseases has proved our ability to surmount serious health hazards that appeared intractable till recently. However, the emergence of HIV/AIDS has baffled all for its tragic and unknown proportions. The fearful toll from AIDS in developing countries might nullify the result of decades of hard labor in achieving reduction in morbidity and mortality.

Poverty as the biggest challenge remains the central issue in developing countries as over 90 percent of the current growth in population is taking place in the developing countries. High rates of population growth, poverty and under development are all inter linked. Therefore it is all the more necessary to break the nexus between high

fertility poverty, ill health and illiteracy in the context of population stabilization and sustainable development.

Rapid population growth has also brought unprecedented increase in the working age groups. Employment opportunities for new entrants to the labor force is dominating the economic agenda of the developing countries. The economic reforms have raised new hopes of more employment opportunities in the developing world.

No amount of economic development would suffice to meet the challenges of ever increasing growth of population unless we succeed in quickly arresting the same. The rate at which our large population is growing eats away almost all the fruits of our developmental efforts. In order to bring about a meaningful and sustained improvement in the quality of life of our people, it is necessary to put an immediate brake on the population growth and break the nexus between overpopulation and poverty.

The Family Welfare Programme in India aims to provide family planning services within the broader context of maternal and child health care. A vast infrastructure of health care delivery has been created to provide family planning services, enabling people to plan their families after choosing a method most suitable to them. The emphasis has been on promoting information education and communication on reproductive health of women, spacing of children, reducing maternal and infant mortality and small family for improving the quality of life. Medical termination of pregnancy by law is intended to protect the health of the mother and not as a device of family planning. family planning in our country is entirely on voluntary basis .

The Maternal Health and Child Survival Programme has been supplemented by a new Child Survival and Safe Motherhood programme aimed at reducing maternal mortality; these are under implementation. They involve training of traditional birth attendants, provision of aseptic delivery sets and strengthening of first referral units to deal with high risk and obstetric emergencies.

A number of schemes for women in the area of agriculture, animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, khadi and village industries and sericulture have been initiated. A national Credit Fund for Women has been created to meet the credit needs of poor women in the informal sector through the mediation of NGOs and the 'Mahila Samridhi Yojana'.

The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) has special provisions for women. The employment generation programmes called Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and N'ehru Rozgar Yojana, provide for a 30: reservation for women. Training of the Youth for self-employment (TRYSEM) Scheme prescribes a norm of having at least for one third trainees as women. Another project called the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) generates self-employment for women belonging to poor families.

A special Adolescent Girl Programme has been launched through the ICDS system for reaching out to school drop-out adolescent girls in the age group 11-18 years.

Gender equality in terms of equal status, and political social and economic right, is a Fundamental Right guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. Various laws have been enacted to provide protection to women against social discrimination and exploitation. To ensure the

Constitutional and legal safe-guard provided to women, a National Commission for women has been set up.

Despite the tremendous progress made in improving the status of women, socio-cultural traditions continue to assign a subordinate role for women. We firmly believe that empowerment of women in terms of literacy, employment and access to quality health and family welfare services will lead not only to greater equality but to faster economic growth as well.

We together have the will and ability to make this world a healthy and happy home for our future generations. Let us not fail. Let not posterity accuse us of having failed or faltered in our attempts to provide Health for All. Mr. President and distinguished delegates, I would like to conclude by quoting our great leader, late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, under whose leadership India won UN Population Award in 1982.

We are here because we do believe that minds and attitudes can and must be changed and that injustice and suffering can and must be diminished. Our world is small; it has room for all of us but it has room for all us to live together and to improve the quality of the lives for our peoples in peace and harmony.

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