



# 94-09-06: Statement of New Zealand, H.E. Mrs. Katherine O'Reagan

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AS WRITTEN

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and

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NEW ZEALAND

Address to

UNITED NATIONS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

CAIRO

6 September 1994

Mr President,

Population policies must be about making people count, not counting people.

Our ultimate goal should be to meet people's basic human rights to enable them to make informed, real choices about their own well-being and that of their children.

This is integral to achieving sustainable human, social and economic development.

The need for major international action on population and development is well documented.

Statistical evidence tells us much of the story but we must not lose sight of the fact that we are talking about real people and the quality of their lives, their health, their struggles and their hopes.

This Conference has shifted the focus from counting numbers to emphasising support for development and improved quality of life.

New Zealand supports this approach and the consensus that has emerged placing population concerns in the wider context of development issues.

Population objectives need to be achieved through development programmes that promote sustainable economic growth, extend education and health and improve women's status and rights.

New Zealand has also worked to ensure that the Programme takes account of the perspective of indigenous people on population and development issues.

Today I wish to highlight three issues that are of importance to New Zealand:

- \*issues for women

- \*issues for adolescents

- \*and issues for our South Pacific Region

New Zealand is pleased that the Programme of Action clearly recognises that the improvement of the educational, political, social, economic and health status of women is essential to the achievement of sustainable development.

This is a significant advancement when one considers that this was a matter of debate not so long ago

The focus of much of the debate has now shifted to the issue of reproductive health.

This has emerged as a key topic for this conference and one which engenders strong emotion.

New Zealand supports the World Health Organization's definitions of reproductive health and sexual health.

We believe these definitions provide an excellent framework and basis from which to discuss these issues.

The definitions seek to clarify and describe key elements.

They do not, in our view, seek to promote particular elements.

The World Health Organization definition of reproductive health implies the right of men and women to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of 'fertility regulation'.

The term 'fertility regulation' encompasses a broad spectrum, both pre and post-conception, including abstinence, natural family planning, use of contraceptive pharmaceuticals and devices, post-coital contraception and pregnancy termination.

The definition is thus broad enough to encompass a spectrum of views on how fertility regulation can be achieved.

Abortion is the most contentious issue.

World Health Organization statistics tell us that 30-40 million legal abortions are performed each year.

The number of illegal abortions performed each year can only be an estimate.

Abortion is a well-established and long-standing form of fertility regulation and one which this conference is seeking to address as an urgent public health issue.

In acknowledging the existence of abortion as a form of fertility regulation through adoption of the WHO definition of reproductive health, the conference neither condones nor promotes it.

Rather it acknowledges its existence and seeks to address the issues which it raises.

For many, abortion is seen as a moral issue. For many others, it is seen as a public health issue where unsafe abortions claim the lives of thousands of women each year.

I believe that all of us would prefer to prevent a pregnancy rather than end one.

This can only be achieved by improved fertility management before conception.

It is hard to imagine that any nation could oppose the concept that all children should be wanted children and that all pregnancies should be wanted pregnancies.

That must be our aim.

Our success will be measured by the reduction in the recourse to abortion and in particular recourse to unsafe abortion.

To achieve this couples and individuals need to be able to exercise real choice in the management of their own fertility to ensure that each pregnancy is wanted.

We acknowledge that the health and life of the mother versus the health and life of the unborn child poses a moral dilemma for some nation states.

Nevertheless, our view is that governments must deal openly and forthrightly with unsafe abortion as a major public health concern.

Prevention of unwanted pregnancy should be given priority through sexual health education and expanded and approved family planning services to minimize the need for women to resort to abortion.

Abortion should not be promoted as a method of family planning and countries should provide abortion services within their own legal framework.

Further, women considering abortions should have access to reliable information and counselling services.

In the words of the Programme of Action: 'The focus must be on the 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'.

Let us work towards achieving this.

The second issue related to reproductive health that is of real concern to us is the dramatic increase in teenage sexual activity and fertility.

In many nations, including New Zealand, the levels of knowledge about reproductive health and contraception amongst young people, are poor.

Poor knowledge and practice often results in unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

The personal and social costs of this for our young people and for societies is high.

It is significant to note that a World Health Organization review of 19 studies from around the world showed that offering sexuality education in schools often delayed or decreased sexual activity.

The programmes that were found to be most effective were those given before young people became sexually active.

Ensuring that young people are well-informed is a shared responsibility of family, community and school.

New Zealand supports the Programme of Action in its bid to ensure that such educational efforts are made at an early age and that young people are able to make informed decisions about their sexual health and fertility.

While recognizing the vital role that families play in shaping the values of their children and educating them for eventual independence, we nevertheless support the rights of young people to confidentiality and privacy in seeking reproductive health information and services.

Responsible young people are more likely to become responsible adults.

They should be given every encouragement.

It is clear that the nature of population and development needs, varies both between and within countries, and from region to region.

The South Pacific Region is characterized by high population growth.

Migration from rural to urban areas and to developed countries of the region is substantial.

The populations are increasingly young.

Economic growth, despite considerable aid flows, remains low.

Climate change threatens vital land areas.

Indeed, for some atolls their very existence is under threat.

These issues have been articulated by South Pacific countries in the Port Vila Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development.

Population related concerns can be just as real for people living in small populations as for those in large populations.



New Zealand, through its bilateral aid programmes, works with partner Governments of the South Pacific on a range of projects relating to aspects of population and development.

While our assistance is modest, we think it is well directed.

New Zealand also continues to support multilateral agencies working in the population area.

In this respect I am pleased to say in the current financial year we will be increasing, by over 20 per cent, our contributions to the United Nations Population Fund and the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

Support for these organizations is an important way for a small donor like New Zealand to assist international action on population and development.

Mr. President, much of the Programme of Action is already in place.

I hope that remaining outstanding issues will be successfully resolved. It would be a tragedy if one particular issue eclipsed the important consensus already achieved, especially in the area of gender equity and education - two vital components in sustainable development.

New Zealand considers the current Programme of Action, with the removal of a number of brackets from the chapter on reproductive rights, health and family planning, to be an excellent document.

We see the programme enhancing choice and increasing people's

opportunities to develop their health and enhance their well-being.

For New Zealand there is no question here of trying to impose particular lifestyles nor seeking to override individual conscience or national laws. A key part of the programme refers to the sovereign right of countries to determine their own population policies.

The responsible exercise of free will underpins the document.

It is the vital task of this conference to ensure we reach agreement on a practical and achievable Programme of Action.

In the last ten years we have come along way in recognizing the breadth of issues that have to be considered in approaching population concerns.

I would not wish to understate the challenges that we face.

However, at the same time I believe we have a valuable opportunity to reach agreement on a programme that can make a real difference.

There is nothing mystical about what needs to be done.

The resource requirements are modest.

The benefits are undeniable.

New Zealand urges this Conference to seize this opportunity to take action that can substantially enhance the lives of current and future generations.

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