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SAMOA

Statement By

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of the

Independent State of Western Samoa

at the

International Conference on Population and Development

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Mr President

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great HONOUR to address and participate in this historic gathering. Let me first of all extend to you Mr. President and members of your bureau my congratulations on your election to lead and guide our deliberations. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary General of the Conference Dr Nafis Sadik as well as to the government and people of Egypt for their tireless efforts in bringing this important conference together. It has offered us the opportunity to enjoy the warm hospitality of our hosts, and for many of us to experience at first hand the history and culture of this ancient land.

Our coming together in Cairo at such a critical moment reflects the global concern that rapid population growth is straining available resources and leading inextricably to unsustainable development. The growth rate is such that even as I speak, thousands of newborn are brought into a world already beset with problems of hunger, basic sanitation, health services and illiteracy. Population estimates are so startling indeed that on a single day, over 200,000 new human beings enter the world, quite easily exceeding Samoa's population of 163,000. Therefore, the confident expectation of my delegation is that at the end of this conference, the world community would need to agree on an outcome of strategies that will bring about significant impacts on population and development for the next twenty years.

As part of the global consensus building process on critical issues facing the international community, the Cairo Conference, coming in the wake of UNCED, has no doubt raised global awareness and the level of debate on population issues even among the smaller countries like Samoa who were not able to participate in past Population Conferences. For many countries therefore, like my own, this Conference brings to the fore, the need for a reassessment of current policies. An essential aspect of this is to place matters in perspective, because when viewed in proportion to land size and resources, small island developing countries are, in fact, among the most vulnerable and the least equipped to absorb additional population. Small islands and atolls, many of which are in the Pacific region, have very limited land area, fragile environment and economies. Increased population growth and size would put in the immediate future additional stress on the environment, hamper economic and social development, and inevitably lessen the quality of life for our people. In other words, a small state would face, in proportion, exactly the same challenges of matching economic activity with environmental sustainability as larger states with large populations.

The Pacific region's recognition of the problem and the need to formulate appropriate regional and national strategies led to the adoption of the Vanuatu Declaration on Population and Development in 1993 which has formed the basis of the Pacific Island Countries contribution to the Cairo Conference. Our regional input in the Conference negotiations has centered around four common issues which we hope would be appropriately reflected in the Cairo Plan of Action. These are: capacity building, which is a core issue in any development effort; youthfulness of population - There is a need to tap the potential of youth and at the same time to provide for their needs and aspirations;

higher urban growth - already a common problem for all pacific countries, and changing lifestyles - another potential concern for all.

Permit me Mr. President, to briefly outline Samoa's national experiences in Population and Development Strategies and programmes:

Samoa in its 1991 Census recorded a population of 161,000 and a growth rate of 0.5%. Population size has increased consistently since the 1950's however the same period registered exceptionally higher and lower growth rates reflective of the effect of external migration. Although current trends in demographic variables show a decline, economic growth rate has fluctuated in the last decade sometimes falling well below the rate of population growth. Against this background, we are conscious of there responsibility to ensure that the impact of these variables upon public sector investment in social and economic infrastructure and recurrent expenditure in social services, do not severely tax our capacity to generate resources. The rising proportion of our working age population stresses the importance of rapid economic growth rate and putting in place appropriate population policies, strategies and programmes if current standard of living that we enjoy is to be maintained and improved.

Mr. President, we recognize that population concerns, although long term, are central in the process of balanced and sustainable development. We are aware that where population is growing, stable economic growth is one of a number of preconditions to sustainable development. It also encompasses a range of objectives including growth with equity, environmental integrity, improved living standards for all, especially women and children, open government decision making processes and the enhancement of human and individual rights.

In line with our commitment to the outcome of this conference, Samoa is progressing towards finalizing and adopting a comprehensive policy approach on Population. It has moved to ensure that population issues are integrated into the national economic development and planning process through the establishment of a population focal point supported by a multisectoral advisory body including nongovernmental organizations. Such a coordinated approach will ensure that activities and policies of all sections of government are supportive of population objectives and help accelerate the pace of sustainable growth.

In the early seventies, a Maternal Child Health and Family Planning Programme was launched in Samoa and was geared primarily to improve the health of mothers and children as well as to counter rising population problems. It has provided valuable maternal and child health services community education on population issues and improved access to safe contraception methods.

Like other countries, we have faced religious as well as cultural constraints. However the complementary efforts of both government and non-government organizations through communication, education, and effective information strategies have resulted in changes in behavior and attitudes. We note with appreciation the assistance of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and the World Health Organization in this vital area.

Furthermore, our government in partnership with non-government organizations and with the support of UNFPA, has made significant headway in the integration of population education into formal and non-formal programmes through curriculum and instructional material development, as well as training of educational personnel, community

leaders and trainers.

Mr. President, an effective response to the population problem clearly must go beyond providing family planning services. It must also include investment in the well-being, education and participation of women as they are central to the success of population and development programmes. The establishment of a Ministry for Women's Affairs in 1990 has given significant impetus to our national efforts in the furtherance of our policies and programmes relating to women and development. Also in 1992, Samoa ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Consequently, development activities for women have featured significantly in our bilateral aid programmes with our development partners. Indeed, the success of our primary health care system reflecting human development indices despite unfavorable economic conditions is attributed to the contribution and involvement of women in our society.

Mr. President, Samoa has a young population structure, which together with low economic growth rate, bear the potential for serious socioeconomic impacts. Indeed problems in this area like limited employment opportunities are already evident. Our traditional social system supplemented by subsistence production and remittances provide for the reasonable needs of most individuals. However, opportunities for emigration are becoming increasingly constrained. The youthfulness of our population coupled with a higher urban growth have added to increasing demands on resources and services, including basic education, sanitation, housing, food and urban infrastructure.

In addressing the problems of unemployment, we are encouraging the setting up of labour intensive re-exporting manufacturing industries, promoting skills in tandem with labour market requirements and encouraging services for self employment. These activities are well supported through initiatives sponsored by UNFPA and UNDP.

Mindful of the need not to sacrifice long term development needs in addressing short and medium term concerns, our government has increased its allocation of resources to social sectors over the last seven years. While there is no database by which private social expenditure can be calculated, expenditures are undoubtedly high given the strong community involvement in both health and education and the active role of over 70 non-governmental organizations in community development.

I believe, Mr. President, that we have made reasonable headway in our national efforts. There is however a great deal of work to be done and for that to happen there is a need for capacity and institutional building. This would require effective interaction and cooperation with the international donor community, multilateral and regional organizations. Perhaps an effective regional approach could be pursued through the Country Support Team of UNFPA in the Pacific region with support also from our regional organizations and where appropriate, UNDP's Capacity 21 programme.

Mr. President, typical of other small island states, Samoa's physical environment is fragile. Natural disasters such as cyclones and crop diseases have set back economic recovery. The use of our forests and marine resources is an emerging concern. Environmental protection for my country therefore is an important precondition for sustaining acceptable standard of living. The effective implementation of the UNCED

outcomes with particular significance to small island states including the outcomes of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States is therefore essential. The Barbados Programme of Action builds on Agenda 21 and provides the blueprint for a holistic approach by small island developing states to their sustainable development including population over the coming years. For us, we can ill afford to allow our population growth to outpace our economic growth. However, in order for these action programmes to succeed, they should be implemented in concert with other related global strategies including the Cairo Plan.

Mr. President, our progress to date on population related activities have been well supported by our development partners. There is however a limit to what national governments can do. In formulating our population strategies for the next two decades, we should also recognize that adequate financial resources will be required to implement them. It would further underscore the importance we attach to population activities and strategies in the context of sustainable development. In doing so, we would urge that donor funding for population activities should be new and additional and not at the expense of funding for other development activities.

Mr. President, we must remind ourselves that this conference is about people and we are tasked with the objective of reaching agreement on population strategies that would guide the future direction of population policy and ultimately the well being of our global family, particularly women and children. It is our duty therefore at this conference to go beyond vague expressions of hope for a better world and work toward a credible and concrete outcome in the form of a balanced and broad Plan of Action that would have universal acceptance,

complement other UNCED related outcomes and initiatives, and one that governments can implement in partnership with non-governmental organizations and the international community.

Thank you.

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