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Speaking Notes for
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INTRODUCTION

This is an important meeting at which the stakes are high. They are
nothing less than a sustainable future for our children and our
children's children.

Two years ago, heads of state attending the Earth summit called for

urgent action on sustainable development. This bold, compelling statement was made at a world conference where more heads of state than ever before assembled in the cause of sustainable development. Little more than two years later the primary message of the Earth summit's - the urgent call for action - is obscured by economic recessions, fratricidal conflicts, natural and man-made disasters. Moreover, while the Earth Summit's Agenda 21 acknowledged the relationship between population, consumption and natural resources, it failed to adopt the policies needed to address population growth and development. Initial steps were indeed taken. But too few, too slowly.

I believe we have a responsibility to use this conference as a second chance - a second window of opportunity - to answer that urgent call for action, and to advance the sustainable development agenda in a meaningful way.

THE POPULATION ENVIRONMENT DYNAMIC

The facts speak for themselves. We have one Earth. One life support system. And it is shrinking.

Over the past year alone, the global population has grown by 93 million people, bringing the total global population to about 5.7 billion. This amounts to a new city of 250,000 each day, or a new country

with the population of Mexico each year. Most of these new citizens of Earth are among the poorest of the poor.

If this trend continues, in this decade alone, the world's population

will increase by one billion people. The population increase this decade will be bigger than in any other decade in our history.

By the middle of the next century, the global population will have increased 80% by UN estimates, and consumption per person will have doubled, assuming low growth rates. Although there was little debate about the linkage between population and environmental issues that should be highlighted in the negotiation text for this summit, in my opinion, it is impossible and self-defeating to separate the two. Population-related problems are at the heart of many sustainable development issues. Population growth and development can be seen as two sides of the same coin, just as it is now recognized that environment and economy go hand in hand. Witness the more than one billion people - mostly in the developing world - whose lives are squeezed between vicious cycles of poverty and environmental degradation.

IMPACTS OF POPULATION ON THE ENVIRONMENT

What impact has population growth on our Earth's resources and life support systems? Regardless of the level of development, population growth means increased energy use, increased resource consumption, environmental stress. It cannot be more clear that we are overconsuming - in all our human activities - and that we are draining our planet's ability to support us.

For many of us living in developed countries, we are becoming well-acquainted with population related problems, whether we recognize them as such or not. Air and water pollution, difficulties in sitting landfills, loss of migratory fish stocks and congested roads are just symptoms of the problem of population growth.

For those living in developing countries, population growth affects the environment and quality of life in very basic ways. Rapid population growth increases pressure on resources, often forcing communities into unsustainable practices for the simple purpose of obtaining the food, fuel and shelter needed to survive.

The fact that Rwanda has the highest population density of any African nation is undoubtedly a factor contributing to the horrendous holocaust we recently witnessed.

Population growth has caused the "resource pie" to shrink, leaving people without enough food and literally forcing them into acts of environmental degradation. Overuse and misuse of farmland and clearing of forests can cause soil erosion, water pollution, deforestation, desertification, increased carbon dioxide emissions, immeasurable loss of biodiversity, and overall loss of ecosystem health and productivity. What was previously restricted to local and isolated events, is now becoming continental and even global.

Consider that:

- More than three billion hectares of irrigated land, range and rainfed croplands are in danger of desertification, the result of over-cultivation and erosion.
- Each year, up to 20 million hectares of tropical forests and woodlands are lost. That's almost twice the size of Austria.
- A one-percent annual increase in global methane concentrations is linked to the global herd of 1.3 billion cattle and the increasing number of irrigated paddy fields

- World automobile fleets will increase by more than 2.5 percent a year, outstripping the 1.7 percent annual increase in the human population. If current population and energy consumption trends continue, by 2025 developing countries could be emitting more than four times as much carbon dioxide as developed countries do today.

- As many as 140 species are becoming extinct each day. If extinction continues at this rate, in the next 30 years we may lose up to 25 percent of our planet's species. While extinction is a natural process, it is clear that the growing human population has increased the natural rate of extinction to a point inconceivable just 30 years ago.

What is important, looking at these increasingly global stresses, is to recognize that the relative impact of human consumption, of developed and developing countries, is far from equal. It is a staggering fact that children born in the United States have 30 times higher consumption impact on the environment than children born in India- or that 80 percent of the world's population living in developing nations uses 20 percent of the world's resources. Further, consider that the average American consumes as much energy as 3 Japanese, 6 Mexicans, 12 Chinese, 33 Indians, 147 Bangladeshis, 281 Tanzanians, or 422 Ethiopians.

It must be recognized that consumption patterns in the South are quickly catching up with those of the North. In the booming economies of Asia, the mistakes of the developed world are already being emulated.

IMPACT OF THE ENVIRONMENT ON POPULATION

Globally, we are also beginning to see the bitter irony of how changes

in the environment are coming full-circle to force changes in population growth and settlements.

An estimated 900 million people are at risk from desertification. This threatens to create large numbers of environmental refugees, many of whom will be forced to move into already crowded urban areas.

Global warming also threatens several populations. A potential rise in sea level and global mean temperature could cause flooding and droughts and shift food production zones, forcing many populations to move.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Clearly, it is no easy job to shape reasoned and responsible solutions to the two most pressing issues of our time. Fortunately, in the months leading up to this conference, I have witnessed a new willingness to deal with population and sustainable development issues. Perhaps this change has more to do with political necessity, and stark reality, than it does with political leadership. Nonetheless, the political tides seem to be turning. As such, the challenge before you is to build on this new willingness. And I suggest that you may have some success in examining the complex population-development- environment relationship if you consider how to build on the principle of sustainable consumption.

What do I mean by sustainable consumption? I am not referring to an end-to-development philosophy; nor do I advocate restricting the legitimate aspirations of the nations of the South.

Instead, I believe a definition proposed at last January's Preparatory

Conference captures the essence of sustainable consumption.

Sustainable consumption means providing services and products to meet our basic needs and improve our quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials, and reducing lifecycle waste and pollution.

By adopting patterns of sustainable consumption, we should be able to meet the needs of the global population and provide industries with opportunities for growth. At the same time, we will not be jeopardizing the needs of future generations.

Sustainable consumption is not an ethereal state between poverty-induced forms of consumption. It is a radical rethinking of our personal consumption for all income levels, in all countries. It must be a fundamental part of our rethinking.

ADDRESSING OVERCONSUMPTION

Defining sustainable consumption is one thing. Bridging the gap between rhetoric and reality on sustainable consumption is another. Putting sustainable consumption into practice requires the world community to address at least two key areas which I believe should be front-of-mind at this conference. First, is the issue of overconsumption.

Indisputably, we must learn to adopt policies to alter unsustainable and environmentally damaging patterns of consumption. Such policies are primarily needed in the developed world, although the developing world must play a role too.

It is not just the number of people on the planet that concerns us. As

Paul Ehrlich recently stated, it is how these people behave. And a relatively small population of rich people is behaving in such a way that they account for roughly two-thirds of global environmental destruction as measured by energy use. Even with the most optimistic population growth scenario, northern lifestyles are incompatible with the Earth's carrying capacity.

This distortion is made in many cases, not because of market forces, but in the absence of a free market. Artificially low energy prices- prices that fail to consider environmental costs - and agricultural subsidies are just two examples of how we are distorting markets to perpetuate overconsumption.

Clearly, part of the solution to the population crisis is to put in place policies to reduce pollution, encourage conservation and reduce waste - in other words, policies which promote sustainable consumption. And a number of encouraging attempts have been made. • A proposal was put forward by the European Community. to reorient the tax base away from labor and onto consumption, which may offer a partial solution. • Several jurisdictions are looking at greater use of life-cycle analysis to examine all product costs.

- The American government, led by President Bill Clinton, has examined a much-needed tax on energy consumption.

- There is a similar case in the European Union where the legislation of a carbon tax is being discussed.

However, in the case of the U.S. and European Union proposals, the lack of popular support has meant that these policies have not yet been

approved.

A comment made by an environmental economist at a recent seminar at UNEP's headquarters in Nairobi drives the point home. He said that, when it comes to reducing resource depletion and overconsumption, "political will is an essential resource but a very scarce one." Let us not lose sight of the hard fact that these policies that address the dual issues of population and development can also have a positive impact on our economy. We must encourage our institutions to accept the challenge.

EDUCATING WOMEN AND GIRLS

There is a second set of issues that, I believe, is equally important for the Programme of Action to address. These issues relate to the education and empowerment of women and girls. This is one solution for which I hold out considerable hope.

My hope does not reflect a gender bias. Consider that just 12% of African women use contraceptives. Consider, too, that increased education equals a lower fertility rate. In fact, access to secondary school education reduces the average number of children a woman has from seven to three.

Why is education so important in terms of population control? Because it means empowerment - empowering women to know when to marry, when to choose contraception, when to choose to have babies. Further, educating women and girls creates new wealth. Better educated women - even in rural areas - better manage their work and their lives, whether in the fields, factories, or offices of the world. Education enables women to support themselves and, in turn, provide themselves with the ability to

make choices - choices about marriage, children, housing and migration. Also educated women and girls can help the local, regional and national economies.

CONCLUSIONS

While I think it is useful to examine the impacts of population on the environment, and the impacts of the environment on population, I know that not everyone would agree with me. Many, especially from the developing world, argue that discussing environmental issues along with population and development issues, is like putting the cart before the horse. With development, they argue, comes environmental protection.

However, I think the so-called development of the North is hardly an example of that. Witness the overconsumption of natural resources, ozone depletion, air and water pollution, soil erosion. It is all too evident that this planet's carrying capacity is reaching its outer limits and our activities are leading inexorably to a time where we shall stretch them too far - and they may snap.

We have not yet reached these outer limits, but we know the direction we are going in. As such, I challenge each of you to seize responsibility in your own way for the population and development crisis.

By each claiming some responsibility for these problems - and acting on our responsibility - we can avoid the acrimonious debates associated with assigning blame. We can start by saying yes to development programs, such as those to empower women and girls in developing countries to make informed choices, and conservation and reduction

policies in developed countries. By working together, developing countries have a unique opportunity to leapfrog the mistakes of the developed world and to build societies that are not as abusive of our Earth or so unfair to current and future generations.

As individuals, we are blessed with the ability to choose. We now have a unique opportunity to examine our own life and its relationship within the ecosystem that supports us. We also have a unique opportunity to take action to help improve it. With such support and conviction, I remain hopeful that your discussions will advance us another step towards securing a sustainable future for our children. and our children's children.

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