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Address by

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Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)

Cairo, 6 September 1994

Rio two years ago, Cairo today, Copenhagen and Beijing next year - this extremely important series of United Nations conferences reflects a growing awareness that the challenges facing our world are interrelated as well as universal. These meetings are stages on the long road to the management of our global interdependence.

They can be seen as part of the same trend that is leading to a significant shift in thinking about development. Economism, one of the most persistent of this century's reductions, is in retreat. Development is increasingly recognized as a process encompassing all aspects of human existence, and as a right due to all human beings in their diversity.

The regulation of population growth is undoubtedly one of the major and most pressing challenges facing the human community at the present time. But it is only one factor in a complex equation that can spell the difference between greater prosperity for all in a more equitable world or increased poverty, environmental degradation and politico-social tensions of all kinds. Population policies must therefore form part of an integrated sustainable human development strategy that includes protection of the environment, the promotion of economic well-being and the furthering of social progress, including enhancement of the status of women.

To be effective, such a strategy must be radical, in the sense of going to the root of our problems. I believe that this means, first and foremost, investing in education that is to say, in knowledge and knowledge creation, in individual awareness and responsiveness. All the

available evidence suggests that there are enormous dividends to be reaped from investing in education. It is the key - as the experience of many countries has shown not only to economic growth but also to political development and social progress. As such, it is essential to addressing the whole complex of transitional issues on which global human security increasingly depends.

Nationally and internationally, we continue to invest in a shortsighted way. Our investments are still geared to past threats or to dealing with the symptoms of problems. We are largely unprepared or unwilling to address present challenges of a non-military nature that constitute actual or potential threats to human security. Every day we witness the tragic result of our failure to anticipate and prevent. Every day we confirm our perverse preference to pay the heavy human and financial costs of peace-keeping and relief operations rather than make relatively modest investments in the social sphere. We ignore, at our peril, the need to tackle our problems at source by promoting sustainable human development worldwide.

I note with great satisfaction the inclusion of a separate chapter- 'Education, Population and Development in the Cairo PROGRAMME of Action. Education is essential to slowing down population growth without which it will be difficult to raise income levels and achieve balanced socio-economic development. Everywhere, in all social and cultural contexts, increased education for girls and women means lower fertility rates, as well as reduced mortality and morbidity levels. This shows that women's reproductive choices depend on a process of empowerment which can only come from improved educational provision, training for economic self-reliance and the enhancement of women's legal and social status. Special efforts need to be made to reach the large section of the female population that has so far proved unreachable -

the 29 percent of girls worldwide not enrolled at primary school. The 65 per cent of the world's 900 million illiterates who are women. This will call for a whole range of innovative learning and teaching methods, including interactive and distance education, and for learning facilities to be made permanently available to people of all ages, without formal academic requirements.

UNESCO has made women one of its programme wide priority groups. Its major educational project at the present time the Education for All initiative launched at Jomtien in 1990 in partnership with UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank places special emphasis on improvements in the provision and quality of women's education. The latest step in the Jomtien process in which UNFPA has become an active partner was the meeting in New Delhi last December of leaders of the nine most populous countries of the world. These countries, accounting for over 70 per cent of the world's illiterates and some 50 per cent of its population, adopted an educational plan specifically focused on girls and women. The fact that Prime Minister Narasimha Rao on this occasion announced an increase in India's education budget from 3.6 per cent to 6 per cent of GNP is a source of great hope not only for this huge country but for humanity as a whole. It represents a historic leap forward in efforts to curb population growth. The same is true of the measures presented by President Suharto in Delhi, those announced here in Cairo last June by President Mubarak and the commitments made by the Governments of Brazil, China, Mexico, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It is essential that an adequate share of public expenditure be allocated to the educational sector, particularly to girls' and women's education. The Cairo Conference must give particular attention to this important factor and build on the Jomtien commitment to provide Education for All with gender equity.

The family is the basic unit of society and the reflection of local cultural and religious patterns. The search for endogenous solutions to development problems must respect the fundamental role of the family in social life. In particular, the control of fertility should not be based on coercion or technocratic prescription. Nor should it involve the imposition of external models or dogmatic interference. The only sustainable basis for fertility control is the informed choices of empowered men and women, fully conscious of their human rights and dignity.

An important aspect of the empowerment of individuals is education specifically concerned with population issues. It was for this reason that UNESCO joined with UNFPA in organizing in Istanbul in April 1993 the first International Congress on Population Education and Development. The Congress recognized that population concerns should not be viewed in isolation from overall development issues and recommended that 'to adequately prepare the younger generations to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, population education programmes should be extended to the various levels of the education system, including higher education, to all types of educational institutions and to all settings of non-formal education, and be developed as an integrated dimension of educational curricula'. The Congress ended with the adoption of the Istanbul Declaration and the approval of a Framework of Action on Population Education, which in accordance with the express wish of the Congress I shall present to you at the close of my intervention.

As a response to these challenges, UNESCO has established an innovatory interdisciplinary and inter-agency project: 'Environment and Population Education and Information for Human Development. The project

seeks to promote regional and national programmes in the fields of population, environment and preventive education and to foster integrated approaches to the interlinked issues of population, sustainable development and environment. Close co-operation is envisaged with institutional partners of the United Nations system and new partnerships will be sought with governmental and non-governmental organizations, the media and grass-roots movements to ensure maximum effectiveness in promoting the desired changes in public attitudes and behavior.

Such changes must, of course, be matched by firm commitments at the highest levels of government, in the parliaments and in the municipalities. What are really required are State-level agreements among all parties so as to provide the necessary time frame for the implementation of sustainable development strategies, regardless of the political profile of successive administrations. Sustainability cannot be expected from unsustainable governance.

At the heart of such agreements should be a commitment to educational development. If we really wish to promote global human security in all its aspects - including the moderation of population growth - a sustained worldwide effort is needed to improve access to and the transfer of knowledge. Education is more than the provision of information and instruction. It is the awakening of human creative potential; it is the building of endogenous capacities; it is forging attitudes of tolerance and understanding; it is providing individuals with the ability to master their own destiny. For too long the lives of too many people have been dependent on powers exercised by others, on other's visions, on ignorance, on oppression. Education is liberation. It is the main gateway to peace, equity and justice. Those who hold the

key to this gateway teachers, parents and particularly mothers - have a crucial responsibility: the world we leave to our children will depend on the children we leave to our world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our aim I believe should be to curb population growth by giving to all individuals their share of the world's responsibility. But and this must be clear once every effort has been made to reduce population growth, we must be prepared to welcome on board all those who join us on the planet. We must be prepared to offer them a smile of love and tenderness. It is for this reason that, together with the Cousteau Foundation, UNESCO has drafted a declaration on the rights future generations. Their rights are our duties today. The world is one or none. Nothing on the face of the globe and in all future time is alien to us. This must be our guiding ethical perspective as we approach the twenty-first century.

Let me end with a word of thanks to Dr Nafis Sadik for all she is doing to promote education for women as a crucial factor of human development and of social and demographic change. I am sure that under her leadership this Conference will help to bring us a little closer to the realization of our vision of a more just, prosperous and peaceful world.

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