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STATEMENT

BY

H.E. MR. LIONEL ALEXANDER HURST

LEADER OF THE DELEGATION

OF

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

TO
THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Cairo, Egypt

September 6, 1994

Mr. President,

I bring you the greetings of the people and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda. My delegation's passage to Egypt reverses three hundred years of history. This is the continent from whence originated the foreparents of the majority of Antiguan and Barbudans. We are pleased to return to Africa.

This African country is the birthplace of an ancient civilisation which still provides inspiration. Egypt continues, to this day, to serve as mankind's greatest expression of imagination and genius. The pyramids at Giza still fascinate and encourage us to believe that the human race is capable of overcoming incredible obstacles. The promises of mankind's future are inextricably linked to deciphering the mysteries of mankind's past.

Every ancient civilisation and empire have had, planted within, the seeds of their own destruction. Often, it was the same ingredient which assured civilisations' success that also led to their decline. Modern civilisation is not very different. While our countries all yearn to be developed, our planet cannot sustain the burden which the current model of development places on the earth's ecological systems.

Less than twenty per cent of the world's population lives in developed countries; yet, this twenty per cent consumes more than eighty per cent of the goods and services produced by the earth's resources. If the other eighty per cent of the earth's population could join in the identical patterns of production, consumption and disposal as practiced by the developed world, we are assured of the imminent destruction of our planet and, thus, the end of civilisation. To elaborate further, a developed country of approximately thirty million, consumes more of everything than do the six-hundred and fifty million people on the continent of Africa. Hence, humanity must decide whether to proceed with a lopsided distribution of incomes and possibilities along a north/south divide, or to adopt an equitable global distribution with a smaller global population consuming less.

The purpose of this International Conference on Population and Development, as viewed through the eyes of Antigua and Barbuda, is to plot the course of human history in the coming century and beyond. The United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the World Summit for Social Development, and the Fourth World Conference on Women are all part of a grand design to avert disaster, to remove the seeds of destruction from modern civilisation, and to assure generations yet-unborn of a sustainable and equitable future. This particular conference allows the international community to address explicitly the interrelationship between population and development, and to prepare for the challenges which will result.

Mr. President,

In June 1992, when the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development was convened, my country's delegation noted

that henceforth our world could not proceed with "business as usual". Today, we repeat that our world cannot continue with "business as usual". The human race must make a conscious effort to proceed along a path not previously trodden; that path takes into account the many moral dimensions of our diverse human family. Yet, in abandoning centuries-old practices, many belief systems and entrenched institutions are understandably threatened. No longer can Adam's race "go forth and multiply" indiscriminately; no longer can we depend on a bounteous supply of fish from the sea; no longer are we assured of plentiful fresh water and clean air; no longer can we cut down virgin forests to make way for an expanding human population; no longer, no longer, no longer.

The human race has arrived at a juncture in history which demands non-coercive, self-imposed denial; we are at a most important period which demands an abandonment of antiquated views of reproduction. The peoples of the world, through their governments, have turned to the United Nations for leadership. Tension thus results between those who would wish to plan the future sensibly, and those few who would wish to proceed as though a glorious future is already ordained. The differing points of view between this newly secular institution, called the United Nations, and the entrenched establishment is inevitable. This is a battle for hearts and minds.

My small Caribbean country has joined with eighteen other Caribbean countries --one tenth of the membership of this conference-- to help plan the future by supporting the draft Programme of Action. My country is very small and therefore is deemed peripheral to the systems of production and consumption; large and populous States, many believe, are the central actors. The thinkers in these large States therefore regard as essential, finding solutions to those problems which affect

the functioning of their economic system. If they fail, the rest of the world fails, they think. Our failure would hardly matter, they might contend; but then they do not know the citizens of Antigua and Barbuda nor do they appreciate the value of small island countries.

The Global Conference on Small Island Developing States recently held in Barbados, the most easterly of the Caribbean islands, established for all to see and to appreciate the critical role which small islands play in forecasting global ecological good health, and as barometers of global ecological bad health. The beauty of the Caribbean is also legendary. Hundreds of millions have visited us --most from the industrial countries--to marvel at our tropical rain-forests, swim on our breathtakingly beautiful white sand beaches, snorkel at our tropical off-shore reefs, and to seek relaxation from a harried life in their developed countries. The creator's planet is meant to be appreciated, and nowhere so like our Caribbean islands. But death results when the carrying capacity of our planet is exceeded; irreversible damage results when the carrying capacity of islands is exceeded by too large a human population. Small Caribbean island States have solved their over-population problem by emigration. But that avenue is now closing, and we must seek to limit population growth while developing.

If a minimum standard of living is to be assured every human being in every Caribbean country, then the number of humans cannot grow interminably; our islands' resources, like our planet's, are of a fixed quantity. It is agreed that the wasteful production and consumption patterns and lifestyles of the developed countries must cease, that women must be free to make their own reproductive decisions, that education and literacy must be universal, that family planning must become central to our development objectives.

Mr. President,

In its report to this conference, Antigua and Barbuda's National Committee on Population and Development focused on one critical challenge faced by our Maternal and Child Health Division. It is the need to provide continuing education to young women who, because of pregnancy, were compelled to drop out of school. In the past, once they became pregnant, these young women had little hope of ever completing their secondary education. Antigua and Barbuda's Ministry of Education has made bringing these young women back into the classroom a top priority. Our Directorate of Women's Affairs, headed by an extraordinary woman who was recently appointed to the senate by our new Prime Minister, has also established programs to train young women in the proficiency of basic skills. The Directorate's focus is on those who have prematurely left school but who nevertheless are able to contribute effectively to the development process.

In recent years, the trend in Antigua and Barbuda has been for women to begin giving birth during the later stages of their childbearing years. As a result, the percentage of adolescent mothers in Antigua and Barbuda has declined from a high of 28% in 1983 down to 17% by the end of the decade of the 1980s. Positive results such as these can be attributed to the hard work of organisations like the Planned Parent Association of Antigua and Barbuda (APPA). Although it functions as an NGO, declines in international funding for family planning programmes have made it necessary for the Planned Parent Association to collaborate with the Ministry of Health's Maternal and Child Health Services Programme (MCH). The outcome of such an alliance demonstrates that working with governments, NGOs can make substantial contributions to the social well-being of a country. My delegation is

extremely pleased to see so many NGOs participating in this international conference.

Mr. President,

My delegation concludes by recalling that 500 years ago, Europe set out to find new lands as its urban populations began to explode. Millions of Europeans thereafter immigrated to these sparsely populated islands and continents which their adventurous sailors had revealed. The technological progress which flowed from the creation of new industries and accumulated capital after 1492, but especially in the late nineteenth century, made Europe and many of these newly-created States marvels to behold and to emulate. Today, the entire human race sets sail to explore new ways to ensure that our population size and our development choices will not result in the destruction of our planet. Just as controversy and disbelief plagued the sailors of 1492, so too is condemnation unjustly heaped on the heads of those who see the need for this journey. If we are made to fail in our quest, the worst possible future awaits mankind. Mr. President, we must succeed.

Thank you.

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