



94-09-07: Statement of Brazil, H.E. Mrs. Leonor Barretto Franco

ISO: BRA

The electronic preparation of this document has been done by the
 Population Information Network(POPIN) of the United Nations Population
 Division in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme

AS WRITTEN

SPEECH BY THE HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF BRAZIL MINISTER LEONOR FRANCO

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

CAIRO, 6 SEPTEMBER 1994

SPEECH TO BE GIVEN BY THE HEAD OF THE BRAZILIAN DELEGATION TO THE
 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT MINISTER LEONOR
 FRANCO

Mr. President,

First let me congratulate you, on behalf of the Brazilian delegation, on your election as President of the International Conference on Population and Development. Your presence guarantees its success.

I would also like to recognize the valuable contributions made by Dr. Nafis Sadik and the Secretariat. This Conference was preceded by exhaustive coordination and negotiation, in which the effort and dedication of Dr. Sadik and her team were truly outstanding.

The preparatory work reflects strong concern to build a consensus that takes into consideration, evenhandedly, the different approaches to complex and far-reaching themes. I am confident that the spirit of open dialogue and frank cooperation will continue to guide our work. The Brazilian delegation will certainly devote its best efforts to this purpose.

Mr. President,

The meaning of this Conference can be interpreted from two viewpoints. On the one hand, it continues a concerted effort to find appropriate answers to demographic questions, building upon the Conferences of Bucharest and Mexico. At the same time, it provides a more inclusive perspective on the problems that affect the evolution of societies and nations. Thus, the Cairo Conference is one among a series of efforts by the international community, especially by developing countries, to promote broad-based economic and social development.

The United Nations has embraced this search for an integrated vision of development, as evidenced by the global Conferences already held on

Children, the Environment, and Human Rights, as well as the Conferences planned for the near future on Social Development, Women, and Human Settlements.

The new approach of viewing demographic issues in their social context is reflected in the name of this Conference, which explicitly includes development. Its agenda links population issues to environment, gender equality, economic development, and health, among other topics.

The recognition of these inter-relationships validates the concern, expressed at Bucharest by the Brazilian delegation, that the scope of the demographic question not be narrowed to a predominantly Malthusian perspective.

While not discounting the fundamental importance of demographic variables in aggravating the difficulties of overcoming poverty, empirical observation demonstrates that there are numerous other factors which impinge on economic growth and quality of life. The effects of demographic variables can only be gauged properly if viewed in the context of their relationships with the other factors.

It is undeniable, nonetheless, that population variables have direct and indirect impacts on the exploitation of natural resources, the environment and the quality of life, including settlement patterns, education, and public health. Above all, there is undeniably a strong relationship between demographic policies and human rights, in the widest sense particularly the reproductive rights of women.

This last aspect is of special relevance in this Conference, given that the means of assuring respect for human rights are closely related to some of the most difficult issues we face: women's reproductive rights,

citizens' sovereign rights to determine the number of their children and family size, and their rights of access to all the information they need to make conscious decisions on such matters.

Since these questions reach deeply into the very structure of our societies - traditions, culture, religion - it is not surprising that we encounter varied and at times conflicting perceptions about them. One objective of this Conference is precisely seeking a viable consensus. Such a consensus may have to accommodate, on some issues, a diversity of viewpoints, since the sovereignty of nation states - which expresses the sovereign will of their peoples - must be respected.

We believe that the proposed Programme of Action takes account of these concerns, which are widespread not only in Brazilian society, but also in other countries.

On this point, I wish to state clearly the position of the Brazilian delegation, which is based on the Brazilian Constitution and which therefore embodies the supreme will of the Brazilian nation.

The Brazilian Constitution establishes that decisions on family planning are to be made freely by couples themselves. Government should provide educational and scientific resources so that they can exercise this right. There can be no form of coercion on the part of government or private institutions.

In our view, nothing in the proposed Programme of Action - the text of which can of course still be improved upon deviates from commitments agreed upon in existing international instruments. In particular, we see nothing that would suggest that abortion be a method of family planning.

This is an issue of great concern in our society. Brazilian law on this point is clear: abortion is illegal, except in cases in which it is necessary to save the mother's life or in which pregnancy is due to rape.

The Brazilian State provides special protection for the family, by means of policies and laws destined to strengthen family development. In line with our official policy, my delegation will support recommendations that aim at strengthening the family context and will stress the rights and responsibilities of parents, children, and relatives.

As regards education of adults or adolescents about reproduction, we hold that governments are obliged to provide means for individuals to make their own decisions freely.

Adolescents are of special concern to the Brazilian government, since female morbidity and death rates associated with pregnancy and child birth are especially high in this age category. Traditions and prejudices keep adolescents from acquiring the necessary information about the consequences of their sexuality. We believe, therefore, that adolescents deserve preferential treatment in regard to education about reproduction and family planning. The effects of teenage pregnancy and motherhood are harmful for the lives of a great many adolescents. It is necessary to protect them better.

Little can be achieved in the population field without improving the status of women. It is our task to improve women's access to education and to the labor market, on the same terms that apply to men. In addition, it is essential to eliminate the barriers limiting women's participation in the political, cultural and economic realms, so that

women can realize their full potential, pursue their aspirations, and guarantee their rights. These rights include reproductive rights, which we consider to be fundamental human rights that should not be subject to governmental restrictions.

Mr. President,

My delegation is convinced that sustainable development is a concept central to any strategy dealing with population and development. This assessment coincides with the focus laid out in the Programme of Action. We must always bear in mind the negative impact of unsustainable production and consumption patterns on the quality of the environment.

Growing international migratory movements resulting from economic globalization are a source of tension within and among countries. Encouraging democratic institutions is the best way to deal with migration problems resulting from political tension. Migration resulting from economic circumstances must be examined in terms of its root causes, which require renewed efforts to achieve economic and social development.

Mr. President,

We all agree that every country has a basic responsibility to deal with issues of population and development. On the other hand, we cannot deny that international cooperation is essential in these matters.

Therefore, my delegation is pleased to hear that some countries have already committed themselves to substantially increased financing for activities related to population in developing countries.

I would like to point out that the Programme of Action suggests that 4% of official development aid be allocated to programmes dealing with population. My delegation decidedly supports these efforts and hopes to see them put into practice.

Mr. President,

Brazil's current social and economic difficulties are the object of an innovative and comprehensive economic stabilization plan. The goal is to return to the path of growth and to implement policies and programmes that reduce and finally overcome deficiencies in the social realm.

The ultimate objective of our new policies is to improve our population's quality of life, in line with the topics being debated here at this Conference. Our efforts combine public and private sector initiatives and involve nongovernmental organizations.

Our policies are aimed to increasing the levels of child and adolescent education. Improving the health care system includes efforts to control sexually transmitted diseases, integrated health care for women, and food and nutrition campaigns aimed at the most vulnerable members of our society. There are projects to stimulate growth in employment and wages. We are also striving to improve our system of social security.

The complexity and magnitude of these issues demand an integrated and comprehensive approach with the goal of promoting the welfare and dignity of human beings.

The Brazilian government is firmly committed to reaching these objectives, and we are pleased to note that they fit closely with the

recommendations put forth at this Conference.

Aware of the urgency and diversity of our social problems and the importance of the participation of civil society in their solution, the Brazilian government carried out wide-ranging consultations during the preparatory process leading up to this Conference. Our positions stated here therefore reflect in a balanced form the different views gathered during this constructive dialogue.

I would like to point out that our preparations include participation in the joint efforts of the Latin American and Caribbean countries to draft a Regional Plan of Action on Population and Development, which has already been approved by ECLAC. A regional meeting will be held simultaneously with the next General Assembly of the United Nations so that we can incorporate the results of this Conference.

I am certain that this same spirit of respect for the diversity of societies and sincere pursuit of consensus will reign over our work here. It is with this readiness for open dialogue and utmost respect for the sovereignty of nations that the Brazilian delegation joins this historic undertaking.

Thank you.

For further information, please contact: popin@undp.org
POPIN Gopher site: <gopher://gopher.undp.org/11/ungophers/popin>
POPIN WWW site: <http://www.undp.org/popin>