



## 94-09-07: Statement of CEDAW, Ms. Ivanka Corti

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AS WRITTEN

Speech of Ivanka Corti

Chairperson of CEDAW

On behalf of the Committee for Elimination of all Discriminations  
against Women, I have the honor, as its Chairperson, to take the floor in  
this historic Conference.

In my speech, I would first of all like to point out to this  
distinguished audience that the CEDAW (its usual name) Committee is the  
only human rights treaty body dealing with the whole range of human rights  
of women, and is the monitoring body of the 1979 UN Convention and its  
application in, up to now, 134 ratifying countries. Let me list just a few  
of them: Egypt, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Lybia, Yemen, Turkey, Kenya,  
Senegal, Mali, Tunisia, all European countries (Western and former East  
Block countries), Australia, Canada, New Zealand, etc. Unfortunately, the  
United States of America is yet to join such nations.

On the basis of constructive dialogue, the Committee examines the  
progress achieved in the area of equality between women and men in the

State-parties, and its reports and general recommendations are forwarded to the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. and submitted to the approval of the General Assembly.

I should also add that CEDAW Committee issues for each World Conference a question of its own, on the basis of the information emerging from the governmental reports.

This is the case for this Conference as well. The so-called Suggestion no.6 for the World Conference on Population and Development under no circumstances claims to depict the situation of women throughout the world, but as I mentioned earlier, it bases its conclusions on the analysis of the State reports. I must honestly state that our Suggestion is in full accordance with the Prep. Conf. Draft Programme of Action. We see this Programme as an action to establish a sustainable development for humanity and underline the important role of women in it. These principles, in a certain way have already been recognized in the two previous World Conferences of the United Nations, namely the Rio Conference in 1992 and the Vienna Conference on Human Rights in 1993.

As far as the question of population is concerned, the Rio Conference underlined that the "demographic explosion" has produced terrible consequences for the environment a population of 2.5 billion was registered in 1950, 5 billion in 1987, and the figure is supposed to reach 10 billion by the year 2050. Moreover, most of this population will probably be concentrated in developing countries and in large cities, thus causing all possible forms of turmoil, poverty and human exploitation. The Rio Conference confronted us with enormous challenges, namely development and the environment. We cannot ignore the problem of pollution, lack of water and lack of food and nutrition for many people in the world. Nor can

we all concentrate in the rich areas of the world simply because we are born there.

On the other hand, the Vienna Conference, in par. 38 of the Vienna Declaration adopted by consensus, states the following: "The World Conference on Human Rights urges the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights and that this be a priority by Governments and for the United Nations" The World Conference on Human Rights also underlines the importance of the integration and full participation of women as both agents and beneficiaries in the development process, and reiterates the objectives established on global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development set forth in the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development as well as chapter 24 of Agenda 21, adopted by the Rio Conference.

The Vienna Declaration, inter alia, "stresses the importance of working towards the elimination of violence against women, exploitation and trafficking in women, the eradication of any conflicts which may arise between the rights of women and harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism".

"The World Conference on Human Rights reaffirms, on the basis of equality between women and men, a woman's right to accessible and adequate health care and the widest range of family planning services, as well as equal access to education at all levels".

In the opinion of the CEDAW Committee, the Plan of Action of the Conference on Population and Development is fully in accordance with the Vienna Declaration as well as the articles of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, dealing with the particular problem of the connection between population and development.

The spirit of CEDAW's Suggestion to this Conference is also to underscore that at this time of profound political, economic, social and cultural change, when it is being recognized that the role of both men and women is the pivotal force in sustainable development, and that women make up the majority of the world population, their status is highly interdependent with economic growth, elimination of poverty, sustainable development, population issues.

"It reiterates the provisions of the Convention, bearing in mind the great contribution of women to the welfare of the family and to the development of society - so far not fully: recognized, the social significance of maternity and of children".

It further stresses that the role of women in procreation should not be a basis for discrimination; it reaffirms the fact that women should have, on the basis of equality, the same rights as men to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children, and to have access to complete information of safe family to have access to complete planning methods, including education and the means to enable them to exercise these rights. Noting that there is a vicious cycle of women's illiteracy, poverty, high fertility rates and discrimination in formal and informal employment, as well as an interrelation of these issues with population and development issues, and that due attention must therefore be attributed to this interdependence in any population and development policies. Women should also be granted equal participation in the related governmental and non-governmental decision-making processes.

The elimination of the social, cultural, economic and political discrimination against women is a prerequisite for achieving the human

rights of women and for enhancing the quality of life of the people, as well as reducing poverty, promoting economic growth and attaining sound population policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's World Conference has given rise to so many controversies, discussions, accusations and useless attacks.

The Committee that I am representing before composed of 23 high-level experts on women's human from all over five continents. We are very deeply concerned with the issue of the defense of women's human rights, and strongly believe in the universality, interdependence and interrelationship of the human rights of human beings, both women and men.

In the past three months, the terms "family planning" and "abortion" have been attacked with great vehemence and unjustifiably. The CEDAW Convention has the right to "family planning" inscribed in two of its articles (art. 10 on Education and art. 12 on Health). The CEDAW Convention is the human rights treaty body with the greatest number of reservations, but none have been expressed in relation to these paragraphs. Conference education these paragraphs. Why should the Population document not use it, and why should there be no teaching women how to avoid unwanted motherhood's?

As far as abortion is concerned, the document keeping in the explicitly states in chapter VII para. 7.22: "In keeping with the policies of many nations, as agreed to consensus of the 1984 International Conference on Population, governments should take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning, and wherever possible, provide for the human treatment and

counseling of women who have had recourse to abortion".

Shall we be realistic or are we going to turn a blind eye to the situation as it is? Investigators maintain that between 25% and 40% of all pregnancies are unplanned and not wanted. Moreover, 15,000 pregnancies were terminated each day by induced abortion, about two-thirds under legal conditions, which did not always mean safe. About 50,000 abortions were performed under illegal, all too often meaning unsafe conditions.

In the global economy, production processes will ultimately lead to a situation in which the factors of production are cheaper. But low-wage countries do not mean lowest wage countries characterized by an unending supply of unemployed, unskilled, unschooled people who do not attract international capital. Attractive low-wage countries are those nations that have slowed their population growth rates and are directing their investments so as to create a good human resource base. A lack of resources, limited educational opportunities, a dearth of skills and rapid population growth would determine a scenario in which the poor would continue to become poorer.

A better distribution of the world's wealth is certainly needed, but it is also important to introduce a new ethic of respect of the human rights of individuals, both men and women. We must share duties and responsibilities in an equal fashion. A new code of ethics of attitudes at a family level but also at all the other levels of society must recognize the equal dignity of both men and women, and leave to them the full recognition of all rights so as to create a harmonious family and a prosperous society.

The Conference must overcome all controversies, because at the

end of this century, we must be prepared to give hope to millions of young people who live in the looming prospect of AIDS, unemployment, malnutrition. We must also think of the problem of the girl-child, who in many countries of the world suffers the consequences of the son preference.

Let us hope that a new culture of non-discrimination and sustainable development will come for all individuals, whether they live in the Northern or the Southern regions of the planet.

Let us also adopt a Plan of Action for the defense of street children, and take measures against girl-child pregnancies, which are important for the health of both mothers and children.

By taking stock of all existing problems and trying to undertake realistic and concrete measures, we may seek to last the foundations for a new social order and for a sustainable and sound development.

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