



94-09-07: Statement of Ethiopia, H.E. Mr. Tamrat Layne

ISO: ETH

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A Statement Delivered

by

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Prime Minister of the Transitional Government of

Ethiopia

At the International Conference on Population and Development

Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt

September 5-13, 1994

September6, 1994

MR. CHAIRMAN,

HONOURABLE DELEGATES,

It is indeed a privilege and honour for me to be in the great and historic city of Cairo to address this august assembly of high level delegations. We congratulate the Government and the People of Egypt for hosting this important international conference which has been convened at a critical moment when population problems weigh heavily on the world's dwindling natural resources posing a major threat to the global environment.. I should also like to take this opportunity to congratulate you Mr. Chairman on your being elected Chairman of this conference.

Your country Mr. Chairman has expended considerable efforts in helping put together this International Conference and bears testimony to the importance it attaches to the problem at hand. This is a global problem affecting the lives of people everywhere in one way or another. The credit also goes to Dr. Naïfs Sadiq Executive Director United Nations Population. Fund and Secretary - general of the International Conference on Population and Development and her colleagues.

Mr. Chairman

Ethiopia is taking part in this conference a year after the adoption of its population policy. Our participation in this conference is different from that of similar conferences in the past, not only because of this fact but also because we are now living in a new era of political democratization and a people centered development policy.

The problem of rapid population growth has assumed critical

proportions in the least developed countries like Ethiopia where, in the face of continuing technological backwardness it has been and continues to be difficult to meet basic human needs.. While environmental factors play an important role in aggravating the situation at the root of Ethiopia's woes were the misguided development policies pursued by the Military government that came to power in February 1974. During the seventeen years of its reign it pursued among other things, a development policy that totally excluded the private sector from participation in nation building efforts.

Rapid population growth has exerted and continues to exert pressure on the environment and natural resources negatively affecting the quality of life of the Ethiopian people. Among the manifestations of such a pressure are increasing population land/ratios, resulting in among other things over-cultivation, of arable land and hence acceleration of the process of soil degradation. Rapid population growth has also exerted pressure on social services such as education employment health housing and other basic amenities. Of particular significance to nation building efforts is the inequitable access of the rural population to opportunities and basic services. All these factors combine to perpetuate the state of poverty and underdevelopment in Ethiopia

Mr. Chairman,

Currently the Transitional government of Ethiopia has put in place a number of political economic and social measures of unprecedented magnitude and scope. A new constitution that calls for a federal political and administrative structure and one that guarantees the enjoyment, by all citizens of the full range of political social and economic rights is in the last stages of adoption.

These changes in the political sphere are accompanied by concerted efforts to implement an economic policy that places considerable reliance on the participation of the private sector in development processes. Under the new economic policy the command economy is replaced by one regulated by market forces. The policy is aimed at rehabilitating the war-shattered social and economic structure and enabling the country to benefit from domestic and foreign investment.

The adoption of a national population policy last year represented a milestone in the history of the country. The regime that preceded the present Government strongly resisted the idea of a population policy on religious and ideological ground and were opposed to considering it as a factor in economic and social development. It was with the launching of the policy by the Transitional Government that curtailing population, growth as an instrument for tackling socio-economic problems and achieving sustainable development became a guiding principle in nation building efforts in Ethiopia.

The condition that necessitated the adoption of the national population policy are: an exceedingly high fertility rate, high infant and maternal mortality rates, low nutritional status, low per capita income, rapidly declining environmental quality as manifested by the rapid rate of deforestation and soil degradation and last but not least a continuously declining food self-sufficiency ratio.

The core component of Ethiopia's population policy is a significant reduction of the rate of population growth by bringing down the level of fertility to a manageable level as soon as possible. Specifically the policy aims at decreasing the total fertility rate

from the current 7.7 children per woman to 4.0 by the year 2015. To achieve this the contraceptive prevalence rate is to be raised from the current 4.0% of eligible persons to 44.0% by the year 2015

The national population policy underscores the necessity of viewing population pressure in its economic and social context. In line with this, other policy measures in the spheres of -education, employment, health, social security and the improvement of the social, legal, political and economic status of women youth and the elderly have been taken.

Mr. Chairman,

In setting such goals, we fully realize, that dealing with demographic factors in isolation is not going to do the job. The pursuit of the goal of holistic and or integrated development is one of the cardinal articles of faith of the Transitional government and is reflected in all macro level and sectoral policies currently in force and those that are still in the process of being formulated. Population policies and programs are essentially viewed as facilitative of and complimentary to other development efforts

The adoption of a women's policy occupies a prominent place among these measures . Without the empowerment of women, no population policy can be expected to produce significant results. The promotion of women's rights and the creation of the necessary legal and institutional framework to translate this into reality has now placed the gender issue in its proper perspective

Moreover, since Ethiopia is predominantly rural, development policy focuses on transforming the rural economy and society. Higher

proportions of national budget are now being allocated for this purpose. This, we believe, will have a positive impact in terms of closing the rural-urban gap in economic and social opportunities .

In the advancement of this goal, the Transitional Government has adopted the strategy of community based services to stimulate grass roots participation in all aspects of development endeavour. The decentralization policy adopted by the Government represents a quest for a more effective method of involving local communities in development processes.

In view of this, population and development programs are implemented at regional and sub-regional levels. while the national Population council is responsible for articulating general policy guidelines, and monitoring and evaluating their Implementation at the central level, regional and sub-regional councils are responsible for overseeing implementation activities at those levels. This will allow for ensuring that regional and sub-regional peculiarities are taken into account in translating the national policy into region specific sets of activities.

The activities at various levels are coordinated by the National Office of Population which is specifically responsible for formulating implementation guidelines, monitoring and evaluating mechanisms in addition to its role as a secretariat to the National Population Council.

The Plan of Action already developed for the implementation of the National Population Policy during the period between 1994 to 1399 underscores the role of IEC in securing popular support for and

community participation in population programmes. A good proportion of resources available will be allocated in the pursuit of this objective.

Improvement of quality and scope of family planning services, strengthening national and regional capacity for population research, data collection, analysis and dissemination, strengthening domestic capacity for the training of personnel at various levels in the sphere of population and development are areas of population and development activities currently receiving priority attention.

The effective implementation of these programmes calls for the participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The National Population Policy and the Plan of action underscore, such participation by the non-governmental sector.

Mr. Chairman

The importance of this conference stems from the fact that today rapid population growth has become a global problem seeking a global solution. The Transitional Government of Ethiopia is of the view that the successful implementation of the Programme of Action to be adopted at this Conference requires not only the commitment of national governments but also the pooling of global resources. However the Programme of Action to be adapted by this Conference must recognize the cultural and social realities of member states in finding viable and workable solutions to the population and development problem peculiar to those countries.

In conclusion I would like to express my confidence that given the determination and the goodwill of all a global solution to the global problem is possible. We believe that the joint efforts so far exerted

will lead to a further strengthening of international cooperation. We wish the conference every success in its deliberations.

Thank you.

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