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STATEMENT OF

THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES,
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

DELIVERED BY

GEORGE WEBER

SECRETARY GENERAL

Thank you, Madam Chairperson,

Let me begin by joining the preceding speakers in congratulating
you, and assuring of our cooperation in making, this Conference a
successful signpost for the coming two decades.

I welcome this opportunity to address the United Nations Conference on Population and Development on behalf of the 162 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies that constitute the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies which I have the honor to serve as Secretary General.

These 162 National Societies have more than 125 million members and volunteers and some 273,000 employees; their combined annual budgets total CHF 23 billion

The mission of the International Federation and its worldwide network of National Societies is to improve the situation of the most vulnerable. To that end they have disaster assistance health and other programmes that provide emergency assistance as well as seek to identify vulnerable populations in their countries and help those populations prepare for and cope with emergencies as well as reduce the hazards and conditions that underlie their vulnerability.

Against the backdrop of recent dramatic geopolitical in the world which we had all hoped would result in greater opportunities for all after decades of frozen possibilities in a divided world, we have actually had to deal with even more tragedies arising from long-repressed enmities and nationalism. Ongoing and-conflates about power and resources buffer some 60 countries of Europe Africa and other regions. Social safety nets dissolve, human rights abuses and demographic pressures grow, environmental degradation is now visible in its impact, and numbers of refugees or displaced persons are increasing to dangerous levels.

Madam Chairperson,

With world population estimated to reach 8.5 billion by the year 2025 as foreseen by the UN Fund for population, increased migration - both internal and international - will increasingly be a significant global phenomenon bringing serious consequences in its train. These include growing exploitation and abuse of people in the labor market, greater incidence of prostitution, rising risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), a worldwide epidemic of drug use, and heightened tensions that lead to violence and conflict in families, communities, nations and internationally. The entire trend is towards ever greater numbers of vulnerable and victims to care for and sustain.

In 1993 it was estimated that there were almost 100 million international migrants, over 18 million refugees and some 24 million displaced persons. We believe it is much more cost effective to put resources into prevention of massive unplanned migration by dealing with key root causes, and factors influencing migration for example, Red Cross and Red Crescent local structures can contribute to efforts to stabilize rural populations by improving facilities and services, especially in rural areas.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies sees a steady upward trend in the number of people affected by disaster worldwide. While the specific figures vary somewhat year by year, a straight-line projection indicates an average increase of about 10 million people a year affected by disasters. Chiefly affected by these disasters are the poor who live in densely crowded areas in almost every country.

Because we care about vulnerable people everywhere, we in the

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies seek to join with the other participants in this international conference in the search for solutions to the human problems that are caused by massive population growth and failures of development.

Madam Chairperson.

Let me underscore the fact that women and their dependents make up the largest percentage of vulnerable and victims, both during and following conflict and disasters and in more peaceful times.

Their underlying vulnerabilities are based in the close interrelationship between poverty, discrimination, human rights abuses, poor health, illiteracy, lack of information and family planning-related services, environmental degradation, demographic pressures and violence.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies recognizes the dynamic interaction among these factors and has taken the population and gender dimensions into account in its policy framework. In its Strategic Work Plan for the Nineties, the International Federation has incorporated several of these issues under the three major goals of: (i) enhanced respect for human dignity and humanitarian values; (ii) improved ability to cope with crisis and (iii) strengthened capacity of vulnerable people in their daily lives. The collective efforts of our 162 member National Societies (and the 23 in formation), which have an auxiliary status vis a vis their government, are directed at "improving the situation of the most vulnerable" worldwide. Currently, through the programmes coordinated by the Federation, we are assisting some 18.4 million people with the aim of'

"preventing and alleviating human suffering".

We are involved in a wide range of activities that include disaster preparedness, emergency response and health, blood, women and development, and youth programmes. We believe that there is both a prevention and alleviation dimension to incorporating population issues with humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, in addition to basic needs of food, medicine and shelter, we assert that the significantly large number of people we assist have a basic right to information and services that needs their family planning and maternal health needs. Several of especially to improve the health situation of vulnerable women.

Madam Chairperson,

Millions of women in developing countries still die from preventable childbirth-related causes. Contributory factors include disparities in literacy, access to credit employment, and health services, as well as lack of informed and effective choice regarding family planning and reproductive health. In some countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as the NIS despite high literacy, maternal mortality rates are up to 10 times higher than those in Western countries of the region. This is due in part to the extremely high rate of abortion which has been resorted to as a means of fertility regulation since modern contraceptive and other methods are not available or promoted. Teenage pregnancies, prostitution and exposure to HIV and other STD's are also particular areas of common concern globally. W.H.O. estimates that 13 million women will be HIV positive by the year 2000.

The proposed 20-year Plan of Action which is before us, in our

opinion, deals with a number of these key issues and focuses on both policy and practical measures to address them at different levels. We are all acutely aware of the fact that much effort and resource have gone into preparing this comprehensive Plan of Action. Perspectives on some aspects of this document differ. We hope, however, that consensus will be reached on this landmark set of recommendations on the basis of a broadly shared concern about the current welfare and future outlook for humanity.

The essential task we have ahead of us this week is to respond to the rights and needs of the world's population as individuals and as humanity in general. We can meet this challenge by ensuring that all individuals and societies are in a position to make informed decisions and practical choices within their socio-cultural context. The provision of relevant information, complemented by improved availability of health and population-related services, should be an integral part of the strategy in this regard.

Our task requires a closer and more effective collaboration among governments, UN agencies, international and nongovernmental organizations, as well as communities.

Madam Chairperson,

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, for its part, stands prepared to work with the participants of this world event to facilitate the adoption of measures which we believe will prevent and mitigate the potential and current impact of the unmet needs of millions of people worldwide. We cannot afford to ignore the implications of the population dimension in the context of

building sustainable and thriving civil societies. we have already begun discussion of collaboration with the UN Fund for Population in order to incorporate appropriate family planning health education and reproductive health services into humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, we look forward ,.Madame chairperson , to the deliberations of the conference and to the final recommendations which we will take into account in our future work.

Thank you for your attention

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