



## 94-09-07: Statement of Thailand, H.E. Dr. Arthit Ourairat

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AS WRITTEN

Country Statement

of

THAILAND

by

His Excellency, Dr. Arthit Ourairat

Minister of Public Health

Head of the Thai Delegation

to the International Conference on Population and Development

Cairo, Egypt, 5-13 September 1994

Mr. President;

Secretary-General of the Conference;

Excellencies; distinguished representatives and delegates;

ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the Thai delegation I would like to extend to you, Mr. President, and the other members of the bureau, my sincere congratulations on your election to office. I would also like to congratulate Dr. Nafis Sadik, the Secretary-General of the International Conference on Population and Development, for her untiring preparations for this Conference; and I would like to voice our gratitude to the secretariat of the ICPD for the efficient manner in which the documentation has been prepared and for all the efforts that have been made to maintain dialogue with the participating governments. Before presenting our Country Statement, I would also like to express our deep appreciation to the Government and people of Egypt for their warm welcome and the kind hospitality extended to our delegation.

Mr. President,

Thailand has long recognized the importance of population issues, which are interrelated with almost every aspect of national development. Because the International Conference on Population and Development highlights the political and social importance of population issues, Thailand supports its call for immediate and determined action to balance population, consumption and development patterns; to put an end to absolute poverty; and to provide for human needs and yet protect and preserve the environment. The Thai delegation, therefore, fully supports the approaches as reflected in the main themes of the draft Programme of action.

Mr. President,

I should like to inform the Conference briefly about Thailand's population situation, and its policies and strategies in this regard.

Our recognition of the importance of population to national development preceded the holding of the World Population Conference at Bucharest. The first statement of the Thai Government's population policy was made in March 1970. It stated clearly that family planning would be the main strategy to reduce the rapid population growth rate. Subsequently, the Ministry of Public Health was given the responsibility for establishing the National Family Planning programme, which has made possible a decline in the population growth rate from around 3 per cent per annum in 1970 to 1.3 per cent in 1994. The Thai population is currently about 58 million, and most likely will grow to 70 million within the next two decades.

Throughout the past two decades, the Programme has in general achieved the targets set for it under each of the Government's Five-Year National Economic and Social Development Plans. The success of the Programme is due to the rapid socio-economic changes that have been taking place in Thailand which have caused couples to view large numbers of children as an economic burden, especially in term of providing them with a good education. The success of the Programme is also due to a favorable cultural setting, including a relatively high degree of female autonomy, and to the organized efforts of the National Family Planning Programme in providing the contraceptives and information couples need to limit family size.

During the previously mentioned period, the prevalence rate for modern contraceptive methods rose sharply from 14 per cent to 75 per cent, and the total fertility rate declined sharply from 6 children per woman to only 2.2. This means that Thailand is well within striking range of achieving replacement level fertility.

The decline of the total fertility rate in Thailand has been pervasive, occurring almost equally in urban and rural areas. However, although all regions have shared in the fertility decline, some marked differences are still apparent. For example, in the Northeastern and the Southern parts of the country, the total fertility rate remains relatively high at 3.

Nonetheless, more and more people are now aware of the benefits of having fewer children: having a small family enables parents to give their children( more in terms of health, education and welfare. With the infant mortality rate dropping from 80 per 1,000 to 35 per 1,000 live births during the last three decades, it is obvious that the health situation has improved. Yet we have to do more in the future in the areas of providing primary health care; better nutrition, water and sanitation; disease control; immunization; and health education.

Mr. President.

Thailand's focus is not limited to the size of the population alone. The Government is also concerned about urban migration, human resources development, the environment and improving the role and status of women. While we continue to reduce our rate of population growth, we are also committed to improving the "qualitative" aspects of our people's lives; he think that the size of the population is not so important as its

well-being. In this context, the current Five-Year Plan is aimed at fostering sustainable development, equitable distribution of the benefits of that development, improvement in the quality of life of the people, and conservation of natural resources and the environment in addition to reducing the population growth rate to around 1.2 per cent per annum by the end of this development Plan in 1996. We are now trying to reach more effectively certain disadvantaged groups in the population, while continuing to implement other aspects of the Programme.

As I mentioned previously, other population issues also continue to be important in the process of national development and improving the quality of life of Thailand's population. Those issues are complex and interlinked. For example, the Government is trying now to halt the environmental degradation that has plagued us as a consequence of our rapid economic development. Other serious problems resulting from rapid economic growth that demand attention are drug addiction, unemployment, juvenile delinquency and exploitation and AIDS.

Urban migration is another issue that the Government is addressing. It is associated with related problems ranging from worsening traffic to cramped living conditions, and from problems ranging from reproductive health and fertility to environmental degradation. In our efforts to promote balanced development, the Government has laid out strategies for decentralized growth and the establishment of economic activities outside major urban centers such as Bangkok.

In seeking to upgrade the quality of life of the people, we cannot stress enough the importance of human resources development. Education is perceived by most Thais as the main vehicle for social mobility and as a prerequisite for a secure job. In this context, I should mention

too that the decline in the proportion of children in the total population has made it possible for the Government to plan to expand basic education from six to nine years in a gradual and systematic manner, and to increase the transition rates of children from the primary level to lower secondary school enrollment from about 46 per cent to no less than 73 per cent by the end of the Seventh Plan. In addition, the Government is promoting a variety of formal and non-formal education and training opportunities at all levels.

An additional benefit of implementing such human resources development strategies will be further improvements in the role and status of women. As I mentioned previously, female autonomy is relatively high in Thailand. But because we recognize the importance of women's contributions to development, women's concerns are integrated into all aspects of the development process. I could describe these at length, but suffice it to say that increased educational opportunities are at the heart of our approach.

Mr. President,

We have found that not all population problems concern those at younger ages. Owing to the success of our fertility-reduction Programme, the age structure of the Thai population is now changing to one with a higher proportion of older people than ever before. In view of the strains placed on the traditional support systems for the elderly, owing to Thailand's rapid industrialization and increased opportunities for male and female employment, the Government plans to provide support for the elderly; for example: strengthening the family as a social unit and fostering greater involvement of families in care-giving, the provision of geriatric health care services as well as improving the overall well-

being of the elderly through social security measures.

Thailand looks forward to playing a more active role in the future in the areas of multilateral cooperation, particularly by helping to bridge the gap between the more developed countries and developing countries through the exchange of expertise, the sharing of information and knowledge, and the provision of training.

Mr. President.

I should mention that Thailand is one of the signatories of the Bali blueprint for national and regional approaches to achieve a number of important population goals such as the ones I have outlined. In this context, it is an honor for me to express my delegation's strong support also for the proposed Cairo Programme of Action and its recommendations, which reflect the approaches needed globally to attain such population goals into the next century.

In conclusion, please allow me also to express our appreciation for having been given the opportunity to participate in the ICPD, and to thank the United Nations system for all its help in enabling developing countries such as Thailand to work towards achieving our population and development goals in the past and, hopefully, in the years to come.

Thank you.

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