



94-09-07: Statement of UN/ECA, Mr. Layashi Yaker

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UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE POPULATION
AND DEVELOPMENT

STATEMENT

Layashi YAKER
United Nations Under-Secretary-General,
Executive Secretary of the Commission

Cairo, 5-13 September 1994

Mr. Chairman,

Excellency Dr. Maher Mahran, Minister for Population and Family
Welfare and Chairman of the Egyptian Organizing Committee for the ICPD,

Excellency Dr. Naïfs Sadik, United Nations Under-secretary General,
UNFPA Executive Director and ICPD Secretary General,

Excellencies Heads of Delegation and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the onset, let me, on behalf of the United Nations Economic
Commission for Africa and its member States congratulate His Excellency
President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of
Egypt and through him the great People of his country for hosting this
historic event and for sparing no effort to make it a success.

Let me also congratulate Dr. Nafis Sadik and her dedicated team

for the titanic and excellent preparatory work performed and for the enduring patience and great sense of purpose they have shown during the negotiations process. My greetings go also to Dr. Frederick Sai, a genuine son of Africa, who has presided over the sessions of the Preparatory Committee.

It is particularly rewarding for Africa, at the turn of this century, to see the Arab Republic of Egypt, the cradle of one of the most inspiring civilisations, host this very important Conference, whose outcome and recommendations are anxiously awaited by all mankind.

As you all know, ICPD-94 is the third conference of its kind organised by the United Nations. As an International gathering, it is obviously geared towards debating problems that are relevant to all continents and regions in the world. But unlike the previous ones, this Conference is particularly relevant to the specific and acute problems of Africa.

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me state at the outset that we in Africa share almost the same population concerns as other regions of the world. Indeed, the demographic and development trends in our continent are becoming serious reason for concern. Our GDP per capita has fallen almost uninterruptedly over the past fourteen years or so, owing both to inter alia, low output

growth and unsustainable population growth. The rate of population growth has accelerated dramatically in Africa in recent years to reach around 3 per cent per annum today, which means a doubling of population in about 23 years. This is due largely to very high, and almost stable, fertility rates and a dramatic decline in mortality. Over the period starting in 1950, the continent's population has expanded rapidly from some 225 million to about 710 million today. As of now, only a handful of African countries have started their demographic transition from high to lower rates of growth that are more compatible with their development efforts.

Africa holds only slightly over 12 per cent of the world's population. Only three countries -- Egypt, Ethiopia, and Nigeria -- exceed 50 million; and over half of Africa's population is concentrated in nine countries. On the other hand, over half of the African countries have populations of less than 10 million. On the basis of total land area, Africa is characterised by a very low population density. And so, at first glance, Africa does not appear to face a population crisis.

Unfortunately, these figures belie the true dimensions of the population problems which Africa faces. At the heart of these is the unsustainable population growth rate which exerts excessive pressure on the fragile ecological resource base - soil, water and forest resources, and diverse habitats of fauna and flora which are Africa's valued treasures. However, African countries over the last two decades have not been able to create and maintain physical and social infrastructures and productive capacities to sustain growth of output at a rate that would have allowed average personal and family incomes to

grow and to support a rising standard of living.

Population density per unit of arable land has swelled five-fold over the last fifty years to over 500 persons per square kilometre. Without a matching increase in agricultural productivity and growth in the industrial and service sectors of the economy to absorb the additional population, the results have been increasing resort to farming practices that are destructive of soil fertility and the degradation of the fragile ecosystems. In the absence of significant technological innovations in African agriculture, which would require, inter alia, more scientific approaches to husbandry and sustainable exploitation of the continent's renewable and non-renewable natural resources, Africa is caught in the low-productivity trap and intensifying poverty. Excessive population pressure in the rural areas arising from low and declining agricultural productivity, lack of development of rural off-farm productive employment and income-generating opportunities, inadequate development of physical and social infrastructures to improve the rural standard of living -- all these have propelled surplus population to migrate to the cities. Hence, the rapid urban-rural migration and the further pressure on the urban employment opportunities and the over stretching of service facilities.

Indeed, our urban centres are least equipped to absorb -- productively absorb-these teeming millions in terms of shelter, employment, education and health facilities. Almost every city is ringed with unsanitary slum concentrations where the bulk of the urban population live in appallingly squalid conditions. Homelessness is rife. Under these conditions, it is impossible to keep the standard of living from declining.

Population problems have been exacerbated by the unabated conflicts which

continue to ravage many countries in the continent. Millions have died in such conflicts. Over 8 million Africans have been forced to seek refuge outside their countries, while close to 20 million are internally displaced by such cataclysms, uprooted from their means of livelihood and forced to depend on distant charity. The prevailing heart-rending situation in Rwanda is the latest case in point. Is it coincidental that Rwanda has sustained one of the highest fertility rates in Africa, and its population density per unit arable land is exceeded only by that of Egypt's Nile valley and delta? Circumstances vary from country to country, of course; but the potential exists elsewhere for conflicts to erupt within and between countries spurred, among others, by rising population pressures under outdated, low-productivity technologies and concomitant lack of economic growth.

Mr. Chairman,

We in Africa therefore can no longer ignore the linkages between the rate of population growth, on one hand, and the rate of economic growth, sectoral diversification, social development and the standard of living, on the other. We can no longer turn a blind eye to the destructive impact of rapid population growth on fragile ecological resources. We can no longer refuse to recognise the pressures that propel rural-urban migration. Forced repatriation to the land, without creating the necessary conditions for enhancing agricultural productivity and entitlement can only produce further misery. What is in fact needed is both integrated rural development perceived within a technological upgrading and a conscious development of our cities. This will ensure a symbiotic mutual dependence between the two segments of

the society. Robust and sustainable economic growth and diversification in the cities must stimulate economic and social progress in the surrounding countryside. -Sustained and sustainable expansion of agricultural output and cottage industries in the countryside must supply the cities with abundant quantities of food, industrial inputs and vibrant demand for the cities' industrial output and services.

Our countries should devise realistic urban development policies which fully exploit the dynamic potentialities of well-managed cities that are efficiently linked to their country-side and to other cities, as economic and social growth poles, and as high-productivity sinks for the surplus population which will inevitably be displaced from the land by increased agricultural productivity and the need to conserve ecological resources. Much attention must be given to the establishment of competent, accountable and democratic municipal structures with adequate autonomy and self-governing mandate to find solutions to the problem of sustained and sustainable urban growth. African urban development policy must aim at a dispersed network of small and medium-sized towns and cities rather than horrific, unmanageable, polluted and unsanitary mega-cities.

Above all, cognizant of the tremendous resources which must be invested in order to sustain socio-economic development, African society as a whole and governments, in particular, must begin to grapple with the problem of bringing the rate of population growth in line with the potentials of individual countries for economic growth and social development without exerting unsustainable and destructive pressures on land, water, forests, other ecological resources and the very air we breathe .

Similar efforts are needed as regards the size of population and its structures. We need to avoid a Malthusian trap and this could only be attained through ensuring rates of growth of production at significantly higher levels than those of population and the adoption of population policies that are consistent with the maximization of the production potential, which itself could be significantly enhanced through technological development. We need foremost to improve our production possibilities.

That is the surest way to overcoming the demographic problem over the long-term. But African societies and governments should make every possible effort to bring population growth to manageable levels, with the aim of raising the standard of living throughout the continent. The unwarranted low population entitlement in terms of natural resources were engendered no doubt by the desperate low productivity labour intensive production techniques which characterize African production functions. We would therefore need to address this question squarely by working on both sides of the equation -- increasing productivity and empowering the population. We should not treat the population parameter only as a datum and a denominator. Populations should be transformed into productive - highly productive- factors of production. Hence the need for human resources development.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the building blocks of this strategy is the conscious development of the family, a process in which education and guidance should play a

major role. At the centre of the strategy should be the respect for the human being. On the part of society, individuals and couples must learn to exercise their responsibility.

On their part, African governments have a duty to open up possibilities to create conditions conducive for individuals and couples to exercise their decisions. They should also endeavour to empower, financially, economically and politically their citizens. Above all, they should create conducive conditions for the emancipation of women from eons of social subjugation.

Non-governmental organizations, as agents of society and as partners with governments, dedicated to promoting sustained, equitable and sustainable development, social progress, building human capacities, eradicating poverty and empowering women, involved with the formulation and implementation of rural-7 development projects, have a very important role to play in harmonizing population growth with development in this great continent.

Inadequately informed about their sexuality, reproductive health, and the various attendant risks, too often our adolescent children -- many of them barely in their early teens -- find themselves deep in trouble. Many opt for desperate, lifethreatening solutions. On the other hand, abortion, miscarriage, death in labour, all are truly regrettable consequences. Every year, over 220,000 African women die as a consequence of pregnancy or difficult child-birth, a risk which UNFPA has estimated at 1 in 25. Each one of these deaths is unacceptable and could have been averted through proper reproductive health care.

At 95 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, on average, Africa's infant mortality rate is well above the average for all developing countries. At barely 54 years, African life expectancy at birth is nearly 25 years shorter than that of the world's most affluent societies. Africa's disease and disability burden, including sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, is the highest among all regions of the world.

Intensified information and education; wider access to family services; improved general public health care; universal access by boys and girls to primary and secondary education -- all these are necessary ingredients of a comprehensive population policy in Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The importance of population factors in the development process is now recognized almost universally. In Africa, countries are determined, more than ever before, to address their demographic concerns, as largely reflected by the outcomes of the second African Population Conference held in 1984 in Arusha, Tanzania which came out with the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action on Population (KPA) and the third-8

African Population Conference, held in Dakar, Senegal, 1992, which promulgated the Dakar/Ngor Declaration. The fact that the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action on Population (KPA) remains a viable framework for

the development of the region was generally acknowledged at the Third African Population Conference when the efforts made by member States in implementing the KPA recommendations were reviewed.

The Conference noted that despite the increased number of explicit population policies formulated since the KPA, no significant change occurred.

Accordingly, the Conference adopted the Dakar/Ngor Declaration on Population, Family Planning and Sustainable Development urging member States to establish a follow-up mechanism to foster an accelerated implementation of the KPA recommendations. It was also stressed that no population policy could be implemented without a peaceful and stable political and social environment.

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You will recall that the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF), the programme of action for Africa's economic recovery adopted by the United Nations in December 1991, as a compact between Africa and its bilateral and multilateral partners-in-development outlined Africa's major concerns for the 1990s and beyond and the strategies to be adopted to address them. Under the New Agenda, inter alia, "Africa is committed to the deliberate and systematic integration of population factors into the development process ...". To this end, it endorses the principles, objectives, targets and policy

recommendations of the KPA, "including a reduction in maternal and child mortality and provisions for family development and female education and the achievement of substantial and sustained increases in the quality of life and standard of living of the entire population".The implementation of the Agenda was perceived as a partnership package between Africa and its development partners whereby the international community would supply a minimum of US\$30 billion of net transfers in the form of official development assistance (ODA) in 1992 to be increased in real terms by 4 percent annually subsequently and to reduce the burden of debt service which presently drains away about 30 percent of exports.

The additional costs of addressing the population programme which this Conference is due to consider are estimated by OAU and UNECA at US\$2.2 - 3.0 billion annually (at constant 1993 dollars) over 1995 to 1999; US\$2.9 - 3.8 billion over 2000-2004; US\$3.5 - 4.6 billion over 2005-2009; and US\$4.3 - 5.6 billion over 2010-2015. Realistically, Africa can barely support about half of the costs involved.

However, the present magnitudes of net resource flows to Africa are well below the desired minimum of the 1992 level, while there has hardly been any significant progress on reducing Africa's debt, not to speak of these additional requirements of addressing population concerns. Indeed, the resource constraint has even tightened further. It is in fact on the domestic front that efforts at resource mobilization have been more pronounced and encouraging. In itself that uncomplemented effort cannot support a sufficient level of economic and social development. it is regrettable that Africa's development partners have not been sufficiently forthcoming particularly that the continent is currently in

the throes of multiple transitions - from war to peace, rehabilitation and reconstruction; from autocratic rule to democracy, pluralism, accountability and human rights; from apartheid to non-racial society; and from command economics to private initiative. The desired transformations - all of which are central to the demographic transitions, cannot be accomplished and sustained without enhanced support from the international community.-10Mr. Chairman,

UNECA attaches utmost importance to the principles, objectives, goals and targets which underlie the Programme of Action that this Cairo Conference is about to adopt, as these are in line with the principles which African countries have already adopted in their Dakar/Ngor Declaration. The great concerns which are the subject of deliberations at this Conference are part of the mosaic of sustainable humancentred development which the universal human family has been examining in earnest all this decade within the fora of the United Nations. African societies and governments, however, are not in a position to shoulder the full financial costs of activities in the areas of family development; basic reproductive health; the prevention of sexually-transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS; and data gathering, research, analysis, policy formulation and implementation, which have been identified as forming the core of the Cairo Programme of Action.

Africa is beset with acute problems on all fronts of the struggle for sustainable human-centred development, each of which calls for massive resource outlays. Nothing short of a heroic effort is required over the next two decades, for favourable conditions to be created in Africa for a sustainable population growth.

A second complementary problem, however, has been in the past the lack of political will on the part of Africa's leadership and on the part of its external partners to mobilize every effort and all possible resources, to do what it would take to achieve development objectives and targets. It is time, indeed high time, for a firm restatement of commitment and action.- 1 1 Mr. Chairman,

The whole world is challenged to come to Africa's assistance to translate these noble objectives and far-sighted undertakings into deeds and results.

I have cause to believe that strong political will is now gathering force within the African society and among its governments to bring about a change. I call upon our brothers and sisters in the world community to show understanding, forbearance, commitment and support to our development cause. For, in the final analysis, there can be no common future for humankind, nor sustainable development if over 12 per cent of the universal family is left to languish in abject poverty, malnutrition, disease and ignorance, eking a miserable existence by mining ecological resources. The spirit of human solidarity could not possibly accept such indifference. For all these reasons, we, at UNECA, attach utmost importance to the deliberations of this Conference.

I thank you for your kind attention.

For further information, please contact: popin@undp.org
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