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AS WRITTEN

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF ESCWA

AT THE OPENING OF THE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

CAIRO. 5-13 SEPTEMBER 1994

(Translation from Arabic)

Your Excellency President Hosny Mubarak,

Majesties and Excellencies,

The Secretary-General of the United Nations,

The Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund,

Distinguished heads and members of delegations,

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is a source of pleasure that the present Conference is being
held under the patronage of President Mohammad Hosny Mubarak, here in

Cairo, the hospitable Arab capital, always keen to develop cooperation in every field, with the participation of this august gathering of decision-makers, high-level officials, experts and others concerned with various questions of population, development and environment, here to consult with each other and discuss and exchange views in the hope of reaching a framework that would help to establish the organic bond between these basic questions, by better understanding them and identifying their interrelations and impact so as to assist the countries and the peoples of the world to address problems, meet challenges and find solutions more effectively and more successfully.

This Conference is taking place under extremely complicated international conditions under which the whole world is undergoing many rapid changes and is facing tremendous challenges. Two decades have passed since the International Plan of Action for Population came into being, and in the most recent years of this period the face of the world has undergone unprecedented changes. Many regimes which were formed in the aftermath of the Second World war have collapsed, and the Cold War era came to an end, making way for a new hope in bringing about a new world based on values and principles which reflect the human tendency towards peace, security, stability, justice and prosperity.

However, for some years the international and regional scenes have been undergoing rapid changes which have led to contradictory phenomena. The trend towards establishing large political and economic blocs and enhancing close economic cooperation in some regions and areas was accompanied by a tendency towards fragmentation and the emergence of small countries which had once been Darts of greater countries.

While the international community has made intensive efforts to

find peaceful solutions to difficult conflicts, the same stage has witnessed the eruption of acute conflicts into destructive wars, some of which are still unfolding.

Inasmuch as the downfall of the iron barrier between the West and the East promised to transform the whole world into one society influenced in every part by developments in other parts, economic and environmental disasters as well as political conflicts whose implications transcend boundaries and distances have incited the international will; however, the effectiveness of that will has not been sufficient to deal with the implications of these events for many reasons, and they were not addressed with a consolidated and organized human effort to cope effectively with their dangers. Following the collapse of barriers and walls, and the revolution in telecommunications, human societies have become, whether they like it or not, partners sharing the world, nor can it avoid the fears and concerns which obsess humanity at large; much less can it lend a deaf ear to its hopes and ambitions to establish a new, more secure, more equitable and more human intentional order.

Majesties and excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the First Amman Declaration on Population in the Arab World ten years ago, the Arab region has been undergoing fundamental crises and developments, the most pronounced of which were perhaps the Gulf wars, the launching of the peace process through the historical Madrid Conference as a detente in an age-old conflict, while the region was suffering from acute economic problems of long-term social implications. Such implications included delayed economic and social development; inefficient management of development and resources; an exacerbated debt

crisis; increased unemployment and inflation rates; increased numbers of poor people and a wider gap between rich and poor; inefficient satisfaction of the basic needs of the individual; limited participation of women in social and political life; increased population growth rates and intensive migration to urban areas. Furthermore, the Gulf crises and conflicts have brought about new problems for some countries of the region. Some Arab countries have been exposed to economic losses, being compelled to accommodate waves of returnees, which put pressure on their social, health, educational and housing services. Returnees to some of the labour-exporting countries have also had an impact on the structure of the labour force in host countries, which resulted in the exacerbation of the economic crisis and led most countries of the region to find solutions through market economies and privatization; through the adjustment of the structural imbalance of their economy; the adoption of reform and adjustment programmes, in addition to making increased efforts in order to improve and enhance the management of development so that it will comprehend increased integration of housing, social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects and to make it sustainable and filled with justice and good for all.

Moreover, the increased attention given to population issues in terms of their relation to development and resources resulted in the materialization of many achievements in the Arab world in general and in ESCWA member countries in particular. However, these countries are still facing many challenges related to the population aspect. Despite the decreasing trend in population growth rates from the present 29 per thousand, the present population of the Arab world, 240 million, is expected to increase, under prevailing growth rates, to 300 million at the beginning of the next century, and to about half a billion in 2030. This growth rate is considered high compared to the world rate and to

growth rates in other regions of the world

Despite the remarkable progress achieved by the countries of the region in reducing fertility and child mortality rates as a result of improved health, education, mother- and child-care services, more progress is still possible in this field as population projections indicate the possible reduction of overall fertility rates from their present level of approximately six, to only three children for each woman by the end of the first quarter of the coming century, with an expected reduction in infant mortality rate from its present level of 68 per thousand to less than 50 per thousand during the same period.

The main features of population structure and distribution in the Arab States in general, and in the ESCWA region in particular, still need to be considered with more attention in view of their implications for development, the quality of life and the standard of living. The percentage of youth in this region is high but varies from one country to another, from 42 to 52 per cent, which means a lower participation of the population in the labour force and consequently higher dependency rates. In addition, there is an uneven distribution of the population which concentrates mainly in cities and limited geographical areas. The problem of the concentration of the population in cities and the rapid and random urbanization created by internal migration and the displacement factors from rural areas constitute one of the reasons behind the depletion of available resources; service and environmental deterioration; the emergence of "misery belts" which are spreading in a number of Arab capitals, carrying the menace of epidemics; food insufficiency; higher accident rates and the spread of narcotics and crime. Moreover, higher internal migration rates in countries of the region result in the depletion of rural human resources and in a lower rural contribution to production and development. For

economic and political reasons our region is one of the most susceptible to influence by other kinds of migration, including the external migration of Arab skills, the migration and forced migration of Arab citizens from Palestine to neighbouring countries and the immigration of Asian labour to some countries of the region, in addition to population movements among various countries of the region. These types and patterns of migration constitute a challenge to the potentials of these countries as well as to the economic and social planning and development in those countries.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the light of these population and developmental realities, and out of the conviction that the population question is at the core of the sustainable development process based on its mutually influential relation to resources and environment, its direct link to stability, security and peace, the ministerial Arab Population Conference was held in April 1993, jointly organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the League of Arab States and the United Nations Population Fund, in order to meet social, economic and political material and moral needs. The meeting was attended by a great number of observers representing non-Arab States and governmental and non-governmental regional and international organizations in preparation for this important international conference with a view to reaching an opinion conducive to an Arab position regarding the population question and its interrelation with the requirements of sustainable development. Out of the afore-mentioned Arab conference came "The Second Amman Declaration on Population and Development in the Arab World" containing goals which the Arab countries hope to achieve during the coming stage,

at the forefront of which were adequate population growth rates, a geographical distribution more suitable for sound developmental and environmental requirements, the minimization of mortality rates, the improvement of family planning and protection and mother- and child-care services, the development of integrated population policies, programmes and activities within continuous and advanced developmental efforts, giving priority to human development, including the improvement of population characteristics, the provision of various population needs, namely food, health care, eradication of illiteracy, education, productive education, equitable income distribution, basic goods and vital services, the development of women and the enhancement of their status and role in socio-economic and political life, paying attention to disabled persons, strengthening popular participation and protecting human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The countries of the ESCWA region are facing a most important challenge: the challenge of peace; and depending on how they meet it, a new future will take shape in the region. These countries will identify their ability to face their social, economic, environmental and cultural problems and cope with the implications of such problems. Peace will not satisfy the aspirations of the peoples of the region unless it is associated with justice, the preservation of basic human rights, the maintenance of public freedoms and human dignity, the improvement of the quality of life and the standard of living and the abolition of all forms of segregation and discrimination .

Thus, the Declaration emphasized that a just peace was a prerequisite for the achievement of a comprehensive and sustainable development, that human development was the springboard for any effort to achieve a better

standard of welfare and socio-economic progress. The achievement of justice and the protection of human rights are a reflection of general principles to be adopted by population policies.

The Arab position on the population question, expressed by the Second Amman Declaration, included specific recommendations which constitute, in their totality, a comprehensive assessment of the development of population and environmental conditions over the past two decades, in addition to the identification of a plan of action for the future. Undoubtedly, the importance of recommendations, plans of action and data resulting from regional and international population conferences, including this one, depends on the extent to which they relate to reality, the extent of their objectivity in tackling problems and the extent to which they are realistic in meeting challenges which face our societies. It depends equally on the sincere will, the commitment of Governments and national governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as on all concerned with their implementation and follow-up. It also depends on serious action to incorporate population issues in the core of planning operations and in all aspects of life, including socio-economic activities aimed at developing human life through a renewable development process in order to elevate our countries, our societies and peoples to the level of the present time and its challenges, which requires consolidated efforts to achieve a life that enjoys more security, freedom, justice and prosperity.

I wish success to our conference, and may the Almighty guide our steps on the way to the good.

Thank you.

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