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STATEMENT OF THE-GOVERNMENT OF ERITREA

The International Conference
On Population and Development
Cairo
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Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Conference on Population and Development must be
applauded for the pioneer work that it has set in motion to address one
of the crucial challenges to our global society in the 21st century. The

recognition of the symbiotic relationship between development and population; the need to rationalise patterns of production and consumption so as to ensure sustainable development for future generations; and in particular the emphasis that the draft document attaches to vulnerable groups in society: especially, the empowerment of women; the social safety net for the elderly; the protection of indigenous groups as well as the drive to ensure access to universal primary education and health care are all worthy ideals that the international community must strive to realise through mobilisation of the necessary resources.

But while these derivative issues may elicit broad consensus and support, we are inclined to believe that there are differing views and approaches in regard to the central theme of population growth and appropriate demographic policies that the draft document advocates.

Spiraling population growth in the developing world will certainly remain to be a cause of grave concern in as much as it continues to outstrip economic growth. Family planning and the plethora of supportive measures - public education on reproductive health, reduced maternal and child mortality rates, higher expectation of life etc. - that the draft document recommends will not however furnish a real and lasting panacea to the problem at hand. The fact of the matter is that this approach is skewed, focusing as it does on the various symptoms rather than the fundamental malaise of underdevelopment .

In the case of Africa in particular, it is debatable whether reduced population growth will mitigate its growing marginalisation in the global economic order and accelerate its development. Africa enjoys, on the whole, considerable comparative advantages in terms of

territorial expanse and natural endowments. Its population density - even taking into account current rates of fertility - is and will remain low in relative terms for the foreseeable future. The appalling poverty and deprivation that stalks the continent is not certainly due to overpopulation and it will not be eradicated if family planning were to be introduced through attractive palliatives and public education programmes and practiced by 60-65% of the population (the target figure) instead of the current rate of 10-15%. The scourge of ethnic conflicts, massive Internal and external population displacement, and, widespread deprivation will not be healed by the most prudent and comprehensive demographic policy.

In the event, what is required is a much bolder and holistic approach that addresses and tackles the real causes of underdevelopment. Existing imbalances in the terms of international trade must be adjusted to promote rapid and sustainable development in the countries that are lagging behind and in which the economic gap is widening. Technological transfer must be encouraged particularly in the critical productive sectors rather than on few areas - such as those for producing generic drugs - apparently selected because they promote the agenda of demographic management. The effectiveness and scale of external assistance must be increased substantially to extricate these countries from perennial dependence and help them stand on their feet. We believe that the donor community is uniquely placed to meet this challenge at this opportune moment.

Furthermore, it is a matter of historical reality that population stabilisation is likely to be achieved as a byproduct of rather than an antecedent to overall development. Entrenched cultural and social barriers to family planning can only be dispelled in proportion to societal progress in all aspects of life. The various programmes

associated with family planning, and, especially the social safety nets for the elderly, public education programmes for adolescents, empowerment of women etc. cannot be implemented on a sustainable basis from external funding. Internal development would be essential and indeed a pre-requisite for an undertaking of this scale. In brief, the answer does not lie in a compartmentalised and piecemeal approach but on a comprehensive and innovative approach to the crucial issue of development in the Third World.

Thank you

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