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Address

by

Hon Dr Louis Galea

Minister for Home Affairs and Social Development

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Address by Hon. Dr. Louis Galea, Minister for Home Affairs and Social Development, MALTA, to the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt-pt - September 1994.

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all allow me, on behalf of my Government and my delegation, to express our sincere and deep appreciation to President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak and the Egyptian Government for hosting this important conference and for the excellence of the traditional hospitality which the people of Egypt have extended to all of us. We have now drunk the waters of the Nile and, if I remember correctly, an old Egyptian saying tells us that they who drink of the waters of the Nile shall return to Egypt. We certainly hope to do so. Our thanks go, too, to you Mr Chairman, to Dr. Nafis Sadik and, through her, to the Secretariat of the Organizing Committee of the ICPD, as well as to all the members of the Prep.Comm Meetings who worked so hard to produce the draft document for this Conference.

If we were visitors from outer space approaching this blue-green planet and trying to view it in a holistic perspective, we would be interested in the condition of the human inhabitants, who like to call themselves the "dominant" species of the planet. Would we see a prosperous planet, where human suffering and mental and physical impoverishment has been steadily declining in proportion to the increasing sophistication of human technology and communications? Ladies and gentlemen, we would not.

Instead we would see a promising ecosphere dominated by one intelligent species to its own detriment and to the detriment of a number of other species and ecosystems. We would see the bulk of humankind not as prosperous but, in the main poor. We would be informed that out of over five billion persons, over three billion have an average per capita income of only 350 dollars per year. With 350 dollars a year not much of the technological medical artistic, and educational opportunities of an advanced species are accessible at all. Indeed we would be justified to conclude that this beautiful planet is a planet of the poor.

Many of us gathered here for this conference have already drawn attention to the serious anomalies that exist in the relation of underdeveloped and developing societies to the natural environment, local and global. The environmental pressures caused by underdevelopment coupled with massive population, the marginality and low productivity of the natural environments of these peoples, and their particular contribution to environmental degradation - these are all issues of global concern

Needless to say, the developed and more sophisticated societies are great contributors per capita when it comes to the consumption and spoilage of the limited bounties of the income populations, coupled with wasteful, dangerous, and environmentally unfriendly technologies, have already over-exploited both domestic and foreign resources.

All of us are rightly trying, and must try harder, to improve the social, health and economic conditions of the disadvantaged millions, to empower them to liberate themselves from the poverty trap, both for the sake of social justice and also for the sake of the decreased fertility rates that accompany socio-economic advancement. We are also aware that this will, in turn, result in greater demands on the resources of the

planet, resources the renewability of which is seriously limited. It is, therefore, imperative that we plan for an orderly balance between population growth and sustainable socio-economic development.

Underlying many of the diverse factors involved in wars of tribe against tribe and nation against nation, there has been territorial acquisitiveness and territorial aggression which we prefer in our minds to associate with packs of wolves rather than with our own species and our own selves. This unpalatable truth means that the great population pressures being forecast until the middle of the next century could, unless coupled with the required socio-economic development, continue to increase large scale violence in one way or another.

Inequity in the global distribution and utilization of resources of the planet is a major concern of my country, and we feel it should be the major concern of all states. One principal reason for the crisis of Population vs Resources on this planet has been certain forms of ownership of resources, and certain political and economic incentive systems involved in their exploitation. It is these forms of ownership and these incentive systems which have directed and invested powerful human technologies into shortsighted rapaciousness, instead of into more rational approaches to resource management.

Our country has successfully put forward at the United Nations one of the solutions to these problems of ownership and incentives. This solution was the concept of the Common Heritage of Mankind - a concept which not only was endorsed by the United Nations, but gave rise to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. To a certain extent this was a result of the application of the concept of the Common Heritage to the resources of the seabed and the open seas.

The Population •s Resources crisis, ladies and gentlemen, is to a large extent a problem of inequitable distribution and management of resources. Re-ordering our legal and political relationship to these resources, as in the legal formula of the Common Heritage of Mankind, will go a long way towards overcoming the crisis.

We not only have a global responsibility for population - which is why we are here today. We also, and perhaps even more importantly, have a global responsibility for global resources. We, as the human race, must ensure that these resources are managed by using a global perspective and according to global needs.

Our species on this planet now needs, for its very survival imaginative concepts such as the Common Heritage of Mankind, and the concept of the Rights of Future Generations. It needs also appropriate and effective new global institutions. In the wars and disasters of recent years everyone has seen how weak is our global needs.

Our species on this planet now needs, for its very survival, imaginative concepts such as the common Heritage of Mankind, and the concept of the Rights of Future Generations. It needs also appropriate and effective new global institutions. In the wars and disasters of recent years everyone has seen how weak is our global institutional and political readiness and power of constructive intervention. At the same time we are also seeing the immense potential and indeed the ultimate inescapability of such effective international machinery. mankind is no longer a collection of tribes and nations. It is a single organism that has expanded to fill and transform the whole ecosphere. Parts of it are still acting inharmoniously with other parts, but we must find the concepts and the mechanisms necessary to stop this with adequate

urgency.

Malta had a unique success in limiting population growth in the nineteen-sixties. There was out-migration at the time, but there was also a radical drop in the average number of children borne per family, which cannot be attributed to emigration. Demographers have concluded that the change came about as a result of the general education and changed role of women, who at that time started to become full participants in family decision-making and started to get jobs outside the home. One aspect which proved to be a key influential element was the counselling work and the educational campaign of an organization devoted to responsible parenthood - the Cana Movement. This was a Catholic organization. And it is interesting to note that no Government intervention was necessary in order to bring down the fertility rate. An enhanced role for women, the sending of girls to school, and the general social development of women were enough to control population growth without direct State intervention in fertility regulation. Since then we have amended our Constitution, ratified the Convention Against all forms of discrimination Against Women, established National Machinery for the promotion of equality of women with men, changed our Family Law fully to respect this equality, and implemented a range of socio economic, educational and political measures to empower women to maximize the fulfillment of their dignity and role in our society. Demographic transitions from high to low fertility are now happening at a faster rate.

But Governments can also anticipate demographic changes and to some extent enable their societies to accommodate an unusually large demographic class with dignity even in the absence of great national and natural wealth. In many developing countries the new demographic class is

young children and youth. In our own country, with its ageing population, the new demographic class is that of older persons. Although such policies demographic policies are not very common, we have had such a policy in respect to ageing in Malta and it has been quite successful.

Our country has even felt its international obligations on demographic issues. Malta's contribution in this demographic issue of ageing goes back to the 60's when the then Minister responsible for social affairs called the attention of world leaders at the United Nations to this issue. Other countries joined and endorsed Malta's appeal and the momentum culminated in the setting up of the World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna in 1982. Following this, we took up the ensuing Action Plan, and set up an International Institute on Ageing in Malta. The Maltese Government, with the cooperation of UNFPA, continues to contribute considerably to the running of this Institute, which acts.

However, if we are visitors from outer space taking a global perspective, and if we are compassionate beings with the well-being of persons and planets close to our heart, we will immediately realize that something is very wrong. The human race appears to be acting too slowly to its new global and planetary awareness that came through universalistic religions and philosophies and flourished recently through the communications revolution. The species has not managed its own size and has not managed its own socioeconomic-demographic-technological systems in order to put them into some minimal overall harmony with the necessarily complementary systems of the rest of the planet.

One of the overall reasons for this deficiency is no doubt that the global challenge is quite new - it is not several generations old, and human institutions and systems have to have time to operate rationally

on a global scale, or on a local scale with global awareness. Even the very notion of sustainable development is hardly a generation old. Time-scales of events that are taking place, however, are not on the side of mankind.

The problem we are collectively facing today is to a large extent a problem of the type of socio-economic development and resource distribution and utilization that has taken place in the last few decades on this planet - and is largely still taking place.

Both a cause and an effect of this type of development has been a certain discord, a disharmony, of the human race with itself at the spiritual and cultural levels - an alienation from our real roots. We sometimes feel that it is one of the taboos of modern times that mention of this subject is not permitted on certain occasions. I hope that this crucial conference in Cairo is not one of them. It has been the unbroken wisdom of past and present generations that both the human person and reality in general have dimensions that extend beyond the incomplete materialistic model of the universe.

This is a perspective that Moslems, Christians, Hindus, and members of almost any major religion ultimately subscribe to. It is in fact the spiritualities of world religions, and the insight of enlightened and compassionate persons, that have thrown light on these underlying realities and on the means for attuning oneself to them.

The decision-makers of the human race ignore this dimension only at great risk to the human species as a whole and to the biosphere. Because apparently it is precisely alienation from this dimension that has been a major feature (probably both cause and effect) of the dehumanizing



forms of development that have been taking place.

We also know that if one cuts oneself off from this dimension the result is insecurity, selfishness, acquisitiveness, insensitivity, disharmony, alienation. We do know that cut off from this source, we easily consider others as basically Other, basically separate, basically not-I not-We. In the past was slaves, women, and minorities. Today it is our poor, our immigrants, our fetuses.

We believe that insensitivity to this dimension of human life and of nature has been a major cause of the crucial environmental and social crises facing the mankind today. It is part of the problem. Please, let us not try to make it part of the solution - it cannot be done. The solution cannot be to ignore our poor and ignore the starving children, to keep our young girls uneducated, to exhaust our non-renewable resources or to abort our own human fetuses and kill our own unborn children on a massive scale. Let us get this clear - these are not solutions, they are symptoms of the same problems that have led us to the population-and-development crisis of today.

Committing crimes against humanity will not be a sound basis for establishing the future of the human race. The national legislation of our own country, ladies and gentlemen, reflects our culture and our respect for human life in that it forbids the taking of human life, including abortion. We cannot agree to methods of birth control or population control that result in early or late abortions. We are against abortion and especially against internationally-promoted and state-promoted abortion as a means of controlling population, and we are obliged to oppose such resolutions at this Conference, as also to oppose the use of language which may be interpreted in this manner.

We also insist that the international and national promotion of methods for regulating fertility should not be such as to violate deeply-held beliefs of local culture and religion. These cultural and religious beliefs should, however, be mobilized in a genuine and non-manipulative manner in order to accelerate development and eradicate poverty, reduce the need for more children for social security purposes, educate young women, promote women's health, improve health services, and so on.

We also hold firm to the notion of the family as the basic unit of society, and we were pleased to see that, following this intervention of the Maltese representative at the Prep Comm meetings, this has been entrenched in the draft document before this Conference.

Mr Chairman. It is a matter of great regret that a charge of hypocrisy is sometime levelled at those who, out of deeply held beliefs and conviction, take a stand on matters relating to the sanctity of life, on family values, and on the role and inalienable rights and responsibilities of parents in the upbringing and educations including sex education, of their children. We strongly believe that sustainable development cannot truly be achieved without the bonding force of these values.

We are now belatedly realizing that we have just emerged from forty years of sterile ideological warfare. We must exert great care not to repeat similar mistakes. Ideological and simplistic philosophies which seek to foster gender discord and claims to a monopoly of caring for women's or children's health and well-being have no place in a world which at one and the same time is becoming one global village with so many deeply-rooted complex cultures to which we all tend to cling to safeguard our respective identity in our shrinking world. In a

Conference where we are promoting women's empowerment, a paternalistic, or maternalistic, attitude strikes a discordant note. As President Mubarak and Mr Boutros Ghali eloquently put it, we need to cultivate a spirit of solidarity, of mutual respect, of compassion, of tolerance and conscience. These are the values that should guide us.

We are apparently still discovering what it really means to be fully human on a limited planet. For the sake of both present and future generations, may our delegates and experts present here today courageously promote a wholesome and dignified future for the human race based on equity and compassion.

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