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REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

CAIRO, 5 - 13 SEPTEMBER 1994

STATEMENT BY

HON. DR. NICKEY IYAMBO

MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

CAIRO, 8 SEPTEMBER 1994

Check against delivery.

MR PRESIDENT

YOUR EXCELLENCIES

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

The Namibian delegation is delighted that the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt has offered Cairo as the venue for the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development.

My delegation is also delighted that his Excellency, President Hosni Mubarak has been elected to guide our deliberations. In this regard the Namibian delegation will offer its full cooperation leading to the successful conclusion of our work here.

Mr. President, Namibia's population of 1.4 million is spread over a vast area of 824,269 sq. km, yielding an average density of 1.7 persons per sq. km, one of the lowest in the world. But, like Egypt, most of the vast land mass of Namibia is arid or semi-arid with limited population carrying capacity. The available records on the population of Namibia indicate a small population base, characterized by a high rate of population growth and a tremendous potential for future expansion. In terms of growth, the population of Namibia increased at a rate of 2.9 per cent per annum between 1970 and 1980 and at 3.0 per cent annually during the 1981-1991 decade.

In essence, the high growth of the 1970's increased further in the 1980's and the projections show that the upward trend in this is evidence of high fertility.

The next age group, those aged 15-30 years, makes up about 30 per cent of the population. Because of lack of employment the youth is experiencing considerable economic difficulties and neglect in terms of human resources development and utilization, leading to high drop-out

rates from schools, the emergence of marginalised children, drug and alcohol abuse, the rising wave of delinquent behaviour and teenage pregnancies.

Women make up over half of the total population of Namibia (51.32 per cent). But in spite of their numerical parity with men, their contribution of the overall social and economic development process is not being fully utilized. The health of mothers and children tend to be at risk with increasing numbers of children, particularly amongst women who are too young, too old, who have children too closely spaced or who become pregnant too often.

Mr. President, the high level of fertility, characterized by the early onset of childbearing and close spacing of births, present risks and hardships on families and Government to provide social and economic support.

Mr. President, with regard to the question on the empowerment of women, the Namibians are equal, irrespective of sex. Special references are particularly made for the protection of the rights of women in the constitution, as well as in other statutory laws and regulations applicable in Namibia. Therefore, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, Namibia cannot negotiate on the rights of its women to decide what is right or what is not right for them, when those rights are already stipulated in the constitution of the country.

On the issue of family planning, the Namibian Government is giving all the necessary family planning information and assistance, promoting responsible parenthood where women and men have to decide on the size and spacing of their families, which they are capable of supporting, both materially and emotionally.

On the question of abortion, the position of Namibia is that it can only be performed under strict medical supervision within the confines of the laws, which state that consent to abortion can only be given in cases of rape, incest and when the life of the mother is in danger. Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen it must be clearly understood that Namibia does not promote abortion as a means of family planning but as a public health issue.

Mr. President, the high rate of population growth without corresponding economic growth will, in the long run, affect the ability of my Government to meet the expectations of its people with regard to health services, education, food security, housing, preservation of the environment and the management of our natural resources.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, it is very important that this conference takes a positive decision on the chapters XIII - XV, which will allow for the establishment of the population growth in the country will continue for the next twenty years, pushing the population up to 3.5 million by the year 2021.

Mr. President, the high rate of Namibia's population growth and associated characteristics have, no doubt, important implications for the sustainable development of the country's economy and its environment.

With over 72 per cent of the population residing in the rural areas, Namibia can be described as a predominantly rural population. However, demographic trends indicate a 5 per cent annual growth in urban areas with the result that cities and towns are experiencing a rapid

rate of population growth. The ever-increasing concentration of the population in urban areas is due largely to the rising rate of internal migration from rural to urban areas. Unfortunately this is a trend which is leaving farm work increasingly in the hands of women and children, as men move to towns and cities in search of elusive wage earning employment.

Mr. President, unemployment and under-employment is a serious problem in Namibia. Already the 1991 census estimated that about 20 per cent of the 494,000 economically active persons in Namibia were unemployed. Estimates also show that the unemployment rate could be as high as 40 per cent among rural workers. Such a situation is causing concern to the Government.

One dominant feature of Namibia's population is its youth children aged 0-14 years make up over 42 per cent of the total; necessary and effective institutional framework that will put into place national population policies and programmes of action in order to ensure international co-operation for sustainable social, economic and environmental development and management.

I thank you.

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