



## 94-09-08: Statement of Switzerland, H.E Mrs. Ruth Dreifuss

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SWISS CONFEDERATION

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Address by  
Federal Councillor  
Ruth Dreifuss

Head of the Swiss Delegation

at the

International Conference on Population and Development

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Compared with the 1974 Bucharest and 1984 Mexico City Conferences, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development is situated in a much wider context - something we regard as a significant step forward. In the aftermath of the 1992 Rio Conference, demographic questions are not only better positioned within the framework of sustainable development, they also take account of many aspects of social development.

We particularly appreciate that the draft document clearly recalls North-South interdependence and addresses the industrialized countries just as much as the developing countries. As the representative of an industrialized country I must underline that the industrialized countries bear a weighty responsibility. With their methods of production and consumption, they are currently the principal causes for the environmental imbalances affecting the entire planet. They also determine to a very large extent the economic conditions within whose framework the developing countries have to find a solution to their problems.

The fact remains that rapid population growth is often a major impediment to improving people's living conditions. In a way, rapid population growth is both a cause and a consequence of social and human under-development. As we are involved in international cooperation to eliminate poverty, it is very useful for us to discuss, in this forum, the best ways and means of taking account of this aspect of development.

From this point of view, we feel that the ultimate aim of international cooperation should be constantly kept in mind placing the economy at the service of mankind to promote the best possible development of every individual. Any policy of cooperation, in the demographic field also, must therefore be based on the fundamental ethical values of respect for human dignity and freedom. A special consideration must be given to the situation of women in society. We must achieve full equality between women and men in all aspects of life. The elimination of discriminations is a first step in that direction. The objective must however be more ambitious: a full equality, a full participation, the freedom for women to determine their own life.

This liberty implies the freedom for couples and in particular women to decide for themselves on the number, spacing and timing of their children and that of individuals to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Any type of coercion, direct or indirect, must be avoided.

The Swiss authorities are convinced that the twin objectives of respect for individual freedom and demographic stabilization are perfectly compatible: experience shows that there is a great unmet demand for family planning services and, above all, that a broad social development, including equality between women and men, leads to changes in attitudes and to reductions in birth rates.

We therefore consider that the emphasis in Conference preparations on the need to strengthen human development, especially gender equality in the access to education and health services, should be welcomed. We feel that these factors are crucial because development in these sectors is an essential condition which requires unstinted attention. Only human

development can bring lasting improvement to social and economic conditions as well as to individuals' freedom and independence. It is increasingly obvious that such human development is not possible unless a major effort is made to correct the inequality between men and women in all aspects of life. The stress laid on this aspect by the Conference is salutary.

Furthermore, we believe that the areas covered by human development must be promoted because of their intrinsic merits, and not just because of their objective contribution to reducing population growth rates. That is why Switzerland advocates an increase in the budgets dedicated to these sectors, both by the countries themselves through their public expenditure and by the providers of official development aid.

Switzerland will try and reorientate its cooperation programmes on these lines, seeking to earmark 20 % of its international aid for social investment, as recommended by the United Nations Development Programme.

The preparations for the Conference triggered numerous discussions on fundamentals, in particular, the issue of abortion quite rightly, as this is one of the most thorny questions of our time in virtually every society. The gravity of the moral dilemma raised by abortion must be appreciated, be it on the personal level or concerning the responsibility of society. We must face the reality of the tragic situation of so many women who have to resort to an illegal and, therefore, unsafe abortion and the fact that, each year, a very large number of women die as the result of such abortions. As long as this reality exists it is our duty to seek solutions.

The abortion debate will not end with this Conference, but it is to be hoped that it will continue in a spirit of open-mindedness. Each

position has, indeed, an ethical basis which should be respected although it is very difficult to reach a common stand.

Fortunately, there is one point on which we can agree - namely that abortions are in themselves a sign of failure and that an attempt must be made to reduce their number. Unfortunately, experience shows that the prohibition of abortions leads only to an increase in the number of unsafe abortions. In this sense, we consider that the emphasis must be placed on preventive measures, especially on appropriate sex education and the provision of fertility regulation methods, as well as material and moral assistance to mothers and couples in difficulty. The responsibility of men is too often forgotten in this discussion. It is important to take measures in order to encourage a greater responsibility of men towards sexuality.

As regards migrations, Switzerland feels that the main task is to combat the political or economic causes that force people to emigrate.

Migration, which implies separations and risks, is often a painful solution. It is often called by the lack of respect for human rights and not only by the lack of economic opportunities. Greater efforts must therefore be made than in the past to strengthen respect for human rights, especially respect for ethnic minorities, to improve the management of public affairs and to support economic and social development. We must at the same time avoid any form of discrimination towards migrants, facilitate their integration and participation in their new country, whatever the reasons are for which they left their country of origin. This is a task for citizens, non-governmental organizations, the States and the international community.

To sum up, Switzerland is ready to commit itself:

1. to increase the part of its official development aid (ODA) in support to social development (health, education, advancement of women's issues),
2. to strive to achieve ODA's objective as announced in Rio, in spite of the considerable budgetary restrictions a small federal State like ours has to face these days,
3. to engage, together with its partners from developing countries, in a policy dialogue on the questions of population, whenever desirable and possible,
4. to continue the dialogue and cooperation between Swiss Authorities and civil society on the Conference's themes.
5. to participate actively in the international coordinated action which will be necessary to ensure the follow-up of the Conference.

I cannot conclude without thanking all those who helped in the preparation of this important Conference, in particular the Egyptian authorities who have extended such magnificent hospitality to us all. We must also give due credit to the contribution of the non-governmental organizations, above all the women's organizations, which have done much to ensure that our approach is firmly founded on social and cultural reality and have helped us to grasp the importance of the role played by women. These non-governmental organizations will play a decisive part in implementing the results of this Conference. Finally, our thanks go to Mrs. Nafis Sadik and to the Conference's Secretariat, who have given the international community the basis for this Conference.

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