



## **94-09-08: Statement of United Kingdom, H.E. Baroness Chalker of Wallasey**

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AS WRITTEN

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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LEADER OF UK DELEGATION TO ICPD

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### Introduction

I am delighted to be here in Cairo among so many distinguished people at what I believe to be one of the most important conferences of the decade. I would like to take this opportunity to thank President Mubarak, the Government of Egypt and the Egyptian people for all the trouble they have taken in hosting the conference. I would like, in particular, to pay tribute to Dr. Nafis Sadik and her team for their tireless efforts to make this conference a success. The UK fully supports the speech of Mr.

Kanthor on behalf of the Presidency of the E.U.

A conference like no other

The central concern for most of us is the need for urgent action to stabilize the world's population. But that is not all. During the last decade we have come to realize that the alleviation of poverty as well as the empowerment of women, their dignity and the need for them to be able to make choices are central issues in population planning.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan eloquently reminded us that population and reproductive health lie at the heart of development. Billions of women in our world are unable to access the educational facilities, health care, income earning opportunities and personal security that they need to contribute adequately to sustainable development. More resources may well be needed to ensure improved access. But resources alone may not be enough. We have sought new visions to guide us as we locate resources and apply them to the needs of the world's women.

New concepts in unfamiliar territory

These visions are embodied in the ambitious Programme of Action being discussed this week. Some of them are unfamiliar and address sensitive issues. No wonder the debates and negotiations have been heated.

We are united by a commitment to enable women and men to access the opportunities that they need to make critical choices - particularly to have children by choice and not chance. We want them to have access to relevant education, to experience safer motherhood and childbirth, and

to avoid suffering resulting from sexually transmitted infection, HIV, infertility and sexual violence. In summary, we seek to promote better reproductive health and educational attainment among women, and to involve men, too, in helping to attain this goal.

Remarkable consensus

I am delighted that nearly all of the Program's text has been agreed with the overall visions intact. I pay tribute to the committed activists - and officials - in national Governments, the UN and non-Governmental organizations who have brought us this far. I am personally gratified to see the particular contribution that women, from outside as well as inside governments, have made to this process.

Many have only heard about these new visions recently. Thank goodness for the controversies, for the debates in the media, in schools, among religious leaders and professionals. Our discussions are now being shared by a much wider community. No-one could accuse us of conducting our business behind closed doors, and springing our conclusions on an unsuspecting world.

Cairo is the watershed

Our responsibility is awesome. By the end of this conference we must produce a useful and comprehensible document that is acceptable to as many delegations as possible. But words and paper alone are not enough. When we leave Cairo the hard work will have only just begun. The Programme of Action will legitimize whole new areas of action that can only be of benefit to humankind. Debates about how best to achieve the fulfill the vision must continue - at global, national and local levels.

We face three substantial challenges.

The first challenge is to find a way to define reproductive health that is acceptable within different countries. We have known for years that it would not be easy to agree on the extent to which induced abortion contributes to reproductive ill-health and deaths among young women. We knew that it would be harder still to agree on action to reduce this suffering. I am delighted that the vast majority of delegations can accept the eight sentences on this issue that have been crafted with such care this week.

If the same spirit of tolerance and understanding persists we will have similar success with other contentious paragraphs. I hope that the few delegations that cannot yet agree to the language will indicate this quickly. We will all understand if some delegations tell us that they cannot accept the consensus view, and explain the particular difficulties they face as footnotes in the Programme of Action. This would surely be far better than seeking to undermine the majority view and creating a time-wasting deadlock. Our time is not only precious, but very, very costly.

The second challenge is for individual countries to examine how they can respond to the visions in the Programme of Action, and put into practice those which are appropriate for their people. It is for Governments to decide what types and levels of services should be available for their people, and what proportion of the national budget should be invested in them. They must decide how the services will be provided and funded, perhaps using private-sector providers where they are the most efficient and effective. Local culture and sensitivity will determine the exact mix of services to be offered, and the way in which they are to be made

available.

We do encourage other Governments to take account of what happens when people cannot access family planning services. On a global scale this includes thousands of women who die each year as a result of unsafe abortions; hundreds of thousands of children born to parents who do not want them, and often cannot afford to cloth and feed them. In the longer term it leads to the inevitable disruption of development programmes and, indeed, of the entire environment that results from rapid population growth. But we oppose the imposition of external concepts and values relating to population and reproductive health on countries against a national will. More significantly, we deplore the coercion of any people to adopt practices in relation to human reproduction that abuse their human rights.

The third challenge is to help mobilize the resources to meet the costs of implementing the Cairo vision and to ensure they are well spent. Many countries will seek additional funds from donors.

#### The British response

The British Government is already responding to the challenges through its Overseas Aid programmes. For several years, now, we have committed ourselves to work with developing countries and countries in transition to improve the lives of families and to increase the number of couples and individuals who can choose how many children they have and when they have them. We seek ways to help improve people's reproductive health .

We are encouraging private sector groups and NGOs to establish partnerships with Governments and non-governmental groups in developing countries, helping women and men to have Children by Choice, not chance.

Through these partnerships we seek to help with the definition of reproductive health, the planning of relevant health and education services, implementing them effectively and monitoring their impact. In this context we support relevant social and biomedical research programmes.

We will provide additional finance too. Earlier this year I undertook that we will approve 50 new health and population projects over the next two years. During that period, we expect to commit in excess of £100 million to bilateral projects, to multilateral organizations and to NGOs. This is an increase of 60% on our present expenditure.

We will play our full part in the international community. We will advocate that more resources be made available for population activities working in close co-operation with multilateral agencies and the European Union. We expect to provide UNFPA with additional funds this year to help it work with countries as they seek to implement the Cairo visions.

## Conclusion

The Cairo visions have evolved and become a reality in the last two years. Real progress has been made through dialogue and debate across cultures and between religions - despite all of our preconceptions and prejudices. We have come this far because of a collective commitment. I know that some hurdles remain, even at this late stage, but I am confident that the constructive spirit expressed by so many in the presentations from this platform will be maintained throughout the conference. Where there are real differences that just cannot be resolved through negotiation and compromise we must find ways to respect

them. We must not persevere in fruitless attempts to cross divides that just cannot be bridged. Time is not on our side. Those who watch us at work - especially those who are not well versed in the intricacies of 7.1, 7.2, 8.25 and so on, will not forgive us if we fail. What is more, if we can not agree on a meaningful Programme of Action, the goal of stable populations and sustainable development will not be achieved.

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