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AS WRITTEN

BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Mr. President

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor to have this historic opportunity to express the
 views of the British Virgin Islands before this august body. Sir, this
 is the first occasion on which my country is speaking at a UN
 International Conference, thanks to our membership in the Economic
 Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

It is my intention to briefly reinforce some Caribbean positions
 delivered in the main committee and to share some of our experiences
 and expectations. Firstly, I must thank the Government of Egypt for

their determined efforts in hosting this Conference, the UNFPA for its most generous assistance and everyone else who is contributing to the success of the effort.

Mr. Chairman, my country is a group of small Caribbean islands endowed with some of the finest yachting waters and white sandy beaches in the world. Our challenge to provide national income for a population which has doubled in the last decade, mainly due to immigration, includes, but is not limited to the sustainable use of our land and marine environment as well as the constant development of the necessary human resources. This implies that a tiny country is faced with the full range of development issues and problems of any large developed or developing country and additionally, the problems of simultaneously managing them to achieve desirable development.

Mr. Chairman, we believe that development is about producing the physical facilities, extending the human range of productive skills, and providing the individual with sufficient security to increase his longevity, to increase education attainment, and to provide, on a continuing basis, access to resources. Development, in our context, and consistent with the globally accepted concept of sustainable development, is about improving the quality of life for all the people, without compromising the ability of future generations to earn a living, from the present set of natural resources endowed to our beautiful islands. Our development is about the strategic and sustainable employment of all resources natural, human, financial and technological in a balanced manner.

Mindful of this situation and the raging battles between the developed and the developing world over the unbalanced consumption, command, and custody of global resources, Mr. Chairman, what options do small

islands developing countries have to choose from? Essentially, we have two options. Firstly, we can ignore history and be unprepared for the peril which has been the teacher and the lesson of those countries, where in the absence of humans were not the first priority. Secondly, we can recognize the centrality and the interdependence of population to development and design a framework for the simultaneous implementation of rational and integrated policies. It is our view, that the former options guarantees retardation of the development process, and deterioration in the quality of life. This has led us to pursue a development strategy highlighted by the integration of population policies in our general development strategy. In choosing this integrated strategy, we have put people at the centre of development, particularly by seeking to empower women to contribute more to their development and extend their range of choices. Our approach to the integration of population issues into development is reflected in our efforts to aim simultaneously at empowering people in all their activities (productive, reproductive and otherwise), circumstances and conditions.

Mr. Chairman, the proceedings in the main committee drew to the attention of delegations the Port of Spain Declaration, particularly in our definitions of, and justifications for family planning services, safe motherhood programmes, services for the treatment of mothers suffering the consequences of unsafe abortions, and sexual and reproductive health services. Our positions are clear, moral, and consistent with those of the primary international organizations in those specialized areas. We are proud of these positions and urge the world community to do the right thing by adopting them.

Mr. Chairman, like the United Nations we believe in:

(i) improving the conditions of and providing for children;

(ii) preventing environmental degradation;

(iii) integrating population in the development progress;

(iv) extending human rights; and

(v) eradicating poverty

Mr. Chairman, speakers so far, have focussed on the traditional problems associated with population and development, virtually ignoring the more recent phenomena such as HIV/AIDS and substance abuse. These are, in fact, identified in the Port of Spain Declaration as priority and related issues with the potential to devastate any country, let alone a small island developing one such as the British Virgin Islands. There is no denying that, if left unchecked, these agents of death and destruction can destroy the social fabric, the economic base and the population dynamics of our countries. Mr. Chairman, let me caution that these problems will not go away. Just as there is a moral and legal obligation to provide support services for mothers, children and women there is an even more urgent obligation to protect our populations from the devastating personal, social and economic effects of HIV/AIDS and substance abuse. Unfortunately, the persons most affected by these two major public health issues are the ones to whom the future belongs, the most vulnerable, the marginalized and the excluded.

In closing, it is my wish to implore the international community to re-think its strategy in collaboration with developing countries to arrive at a people oriented strategy. Assistance policies should be re-

designed putting the basic needs of people as the priority, mindful of the population strategies as agreed in this conference and consistent with priorities at the national level. The international community should be helping us to help ourselves. We are prepared to shoulder our responsibilities within our limited means and encourage you find, together with us, creative ways of helping and not re-ordering the priorities for delivery within the same sum.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for allowing me this much time to address this global gathering.

For further information, please contact: popin@undp.org
POPIN Gopher site: <gopher://gopher.undp.org/11/ungophers/popin>
POPIN WWW site: <http://www.undp.org/popin>