



94-09-09: Statement of Estonia, H.E. Mr. Peeter Olesk

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AS WRITTEN

Mr. Chairman Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor to be a guest of the Republic of Egypt and to have
 the opportunity to participate at this milestone International
 Population and Development Conference. Estonia is a country with a long
 cultural history, which, after a lengthy period of occupation, has
 regained her independence. Permit me to speak of a country which has a
 population a tenth the size of Cairo - that is to say one million.
 Population problems are like the river Nile: man is able to , and wants
 to interfere, yet the secret power of Mother Nature still dictates;
 logic versus capriciousness. Nevertheless, we believe that man acts
 properly when he attempts to harness and control these secret powers. I
 would like to speak about two aspects - firstly, Estonia's demographic
 problems in the framework of globally occurring processes, and secondly,
 the evaluation of these same processes through the eyes of a small
 nation which has developed to statehood and independence.

Looking to the future, small nationalities are in a paradoxical situation. In order not to die out, there needs to be more of us. As a result, it is necessary that our families have more children, and recognizing this, our Prime Minister Mart Laar has declared full support for young families. On the contrary, Estonians are threatened by an imminent crisis - at least in the opinion of some people; since by the shores of the Baltic Sea it is no secret that many of our related peoples such as Votians, Izhorians and Livonians, will have, through assimilation, been forced to the edge of extinction by the end of the century. On the other hand - the more there are of us, the more complicated are our development issues; and countries with economies in transition are continually encountering this - how serious the hardships before them are - however small their populations. The preceding applies to all of us.

The development of the Estonian population has been affected by the consequences of World War II. Today, the number of Estonians is considerably smaller than before the war. Since 1991~ a natural decrease in population has been recorded. Without the substantial immigration of the Soviet period, this situation would have already emerged in the 1970's.

At the same time, I would like to stress that immigration is of particular importance to our future. It is not coincidental that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his speech on opening day, raised the question of how migration influences population. And we are certain that our population is influenced by migration. We support the integration of immigrants within Estonia who wish to do so, and at the same time the provision of assistance to those

who wish to return home.

The Estonian population is characterized as follows:

The pattern of mortality in Estonia is similar to that of Eastern European countries, with a particularly prolonged stagnation of the mortality rate. The present life expectancy, 66 years for males and 75 years for females, was already achieved in the early 1960's. The significant difference by sex in mortality, accounting for 9 years in life-expectancy, has unbalanced the proportion of males to females among the elderly.

A low fertility rate has been a characteristic feature for Estonia. The birth rate has been decreasing rapidly since 1990; at the same time the number of abortions has stayed at the same level, exceeding the number of live-births. A large choice of contraceptives and good information about them are needed for effective fertility control. During the Soviet period, insufficient supply and diversity of contraceptives was a problem. Today, the main problem is their high price. Estonia is concerned about its high abortion rate and low fertility rate. In spite of this, in family planning Estonia is for free choice based upon good information. Estonia supports the opinion of Nordic Countries to enable women to decide freely the number and spacing of their children. The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, presented these views in a very understandable way for Estonia.

Considering the insufficient level of reproductive health in Estonia, the ICPD Program of Action is of great importance Estonia. In this program a crucial part covers sexual and reproductive rights and health, which enables realization of maternal and child health care, family planning and STD prevention programs

The resolution of these problems demands political, economic, as well as administrative effort. Of the administrative solutions available, the most important must be the establishment of a modern population statistics system. The studies of the Estonian Interuniversity Population Research Center show that desovietization of population statistics is of great importance. Only a cynic would consider statistics to be the greatest lie. For the citizens of a democratic country, statistical population data is the foundation for their nation's security.

An updated database is quickly required for our next national census - the first census after more than 50 years of occupation where the methodology and use of data has not been influenced by censorship

Mr. Chairman

We are of the opinion that the problems we have addressed here are germane to just one small nation, but could be in common with other countries with economies in transition as well as many other small countries. It is clear that the problems of other larger nations are different. In order for problems to be understood and addressed by a strategic plan of action, it is necessary to gather at conferences such as this. The many contacts and discussions which have occurred during the several years of preparation for the present conference and the entire dialogue dealing with population issues have similarly been of strategic importance. More than anything else, we require clarity.

The most important tasks in describing current population processes, I believe, are the acquisition of objective data, followed by thorough

analyses with the ever-present hope that the forecasts do not end up being pessimistic.

The sun is never pessimistic and it shines intensively upon Cairo.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

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