



## **94-09-09: Statement of Jamaica, H.E. Mr. Peter Bunting**

ISO: JAM

\*\*\*\*\*

The electronic preparation of this document has been done by the  
 Population Information Network(POPIN) of the United Nations Population  
 Division in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme

\*\*\*\*\*

AS WRITTEN

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

(EMBARGOED UNTIL TIME OF PRESENTATION, SEPTEMBER 9,1994) JAMAICA  
 COUNTRY STATEMENT BY ENTER BUNTING HEAD OF THE JAMAICAN DELEGATION  
 PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AT THE INTERNATIONAL  
 CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT SEPTEMBER 9, 1994, CAIRO, EGYPT

MR. PRESIDENT YOUR EXCELLENCIES LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

On behalf of the Government of Jamaica. I would like to congratulate  
 and thank the Government and People of Egypt for hosting this Conference  
 and for the excellent arrangements and kind hospitality extended to the  
 delegates.

The central theme of this Conference - that population concerns are an

indispensable part of national and intentional efforts to achieve equitable, sustained development - is particularly relevant to small island developing states such as Jamaica and much of the Caribbean. The economies of the Caribbean sub-region are heavily dependent on tourism and our tourism product is based on healthy and attractive environments typified by pristine beaches, clear water, and lush uncrowded countryside. If these environments are compromised, tourism would quickly disappear with grave economic repercussions. Therefore, the mutually reinforcing links between population growth, poverty, economic progress, the conditions of the environment, and unsustainable consumption and production patterns become stronger and with more immediate consequences to our countries. Decisive action at the national and international levels will determine whether these consequences will be either a downward spiral of increased poverty and environmental degradation or, the achievement of sustainable development and an improved quality of life for our people.

Already in some Caribbean countries, poverty and rapid population growth have contributed to over-exploitation of soils and over-cutting of trees, over-fishing and pollution of coastal areas. This is leading to problems of soil erosion, flooding, damage to coral reefs and reduction in crop yields and marine harvests.

Jamaica was among the first developing countries to develop an explicit population policy in 1983, following the recommendations of the 1974 World Population Conference. However, our population policy initiatives started as early as the 1930's through private voluntary efforts and were strengthened in 1970 with the passage of a National Family Planning Act and the establishment of a Government agency to develop and implement programmes. Subsequently, additional coordinating and

monitoring mechanisms have also been developed to include both government and NGOs. Considerable support was provided by international agencies including the UNFPA, PAHO, UNICEF, USAID and the World Bank. These efforts have yielded results typical of the middle to late stages of demographic transition. These are a population growth rate of 0.9%; a life expectancy of 72 years, a fertility rate of 2.9 children per woman and a contraceptive prevalence rate of 62%. Further improvements in contraceptive prevalence and fertility reduction will have a higher marginal cost as additional family planning participants must be recruited from more remote and less receptive segments of the population.

The importance of the family for the well-being of society entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the family. At the same time, the current reality of various family forms in Jamaica and much of the Caribbean, must not be denied. These family forms are: marriage, common law and visiting relationships, single parent households, and the extended family. Up to two decades ago, three quarters of our children were registered as illegitimate. In recognition of the existing diversity of family forms and in respect for the needs and rights of children and women, in the early 1970s, Jamaica pioneered legislation guaranteeing the equality of children under the law.

Earlier this year, Jamaica's Prime Minister launched a series of national consultations on values and attitudes to review and attempt to re-define certain behavioural norms. Among the changes required are the elimination of domestic violence, and increased pride and self-worth amongst our youth. Additionally, in order to overcome the negative impact of our Caribbean history of slavery and colonialism on the family, national and community leaders must promote the full involvement

of men in family life.

Mr. President, over the last two decades, Jamaica has effected several laws to eliminate discrimination against women. There are currently no discriminatory barriers in accessing formal and vocational education. Indeed, at all levels of our educational system, women outnumber and outperform men. The fact that unemployment rates among women are still twice that of men indicates that considerable work is left to be done. Men still dominate positions of power in the political and corporate spheres and must therefore play a key role in the effort to achieve gender equality.

The Jamaican Government recognizes that sexual and reproductive health rests on the recognition of the basic rights of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so.

Adolescent fertility is a major contributor to the perpetuation of poverty among young women with 63% of 15-19 year olds being sexually active and mothers under the age of 19 contributing to 25% of births annually. To combat this problem, family life education is intended to become a compulsory component of the curricula in primary and secondary schools and teacher training colleges. In addition, we recognize the need to provide adequate counseling as well as access to reproductive health services for adolescents.

The impact of HIV infection and AIDS is being addressed through current programmes which promote responsible sexual behaviour and voluntary abstinence, and control and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

Jamaica formulated a national physical plan, a component of which is a national settlement strategy targeted from 1978 to 1998. However, the effective implementation of the plan and strategy have been frustrated by a combination of factors, the most important of which are limited financial and human resources in the institutions responsible. One important consequence has been a strong patterns of urbanization resulting in overcrowded inner city communities with attendant problems of inadequate water supply, sanitation, and housing.

Since we consider the decentralization of the government administrative system to be a pivotal factor in encouraging better population distribution, the Jamaican Government is currently pursuing policies towards this end. Current advances in information and communication technology should facilitate these efforts, which include (i) relinquishing certain revenue collection and expenditure responsibilities to the local government system thereby facilitating greater resources for community development; and (ii) decentralizing the administration of the health and education services, giving greater autonomy for both revenue collection and expenditure. Further measures to encourage the relocation of private businesses and services in rural areas must also be pursued.

Emigration of Jamaicans to North America and the United Kingdom has played an important role in moderating population growth and providing remittances. However, emigration has influenced negatively the pace of our development through the loss of critical skilled human resources and the disruption of family life.

The long term manageability of international migration requires making the home country a viable option. International agencies which finance large amounts of technical assistance to developing countries can

contribute to this viability. One approach that could be explored would involve the creation of data banks of skilled nationals, including expatriate nationals, of the countries receiving technical assistance programmes. The international agencies would then first seek to employ these skilled nationals to deliver the technical assistance before resorting to the employment of expatriate professionals.

Mr. President. Jamaica endorses the general framework of the Programme of Action of the Conference and specifically with regard to the previously mentioned issues. We are committed to the Port of Spain Declaration which addresses the issues of population and sustainable development in the Caribbean subregion.

If the goals of this Conference are to be achieved, governments must act to implement the Programme of Action and mobilize the financial resources from both the international financial community and within developing countries for national population programmes. The Jamaican Government will actively pursue a strategy to include the participation of relevant NGOs in its population programmes.

The developed countries have a duty in solidarity and charity to assist those countries struggling to attain development. In certain cases it is also an obligation in justice as the prosperity of some rich nations came in part from the resources of the developing world.

Direct aid alone will not provide a lasting solution to recipient countries' developing needs. It will also be necessary to reform international economic and financial institutions to promote equitable relationships between countries, particularly in the area of trade. Justice not only requires a more equitable distribution of wealth among

nations, but within nations between the rich and poor because stabilization of numbers without corresponding poverty reduction will be insufficient.

Mr. President, hopefully the controversy surrounding this conference will, through increased public awareness and understanding of population issues, serve to facilitate support for the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Conference. Many of the subjects we are treating with, involve difficult and complex issues. Notwithstanding this, we have a duty to make the best decisions possible. Let us not seek to avoid tough choices which could result in a Programme of Action to which no one objects but in which no one believes.

I wish to thank all those who have contributed to this Conference.

---

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