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AS WRITTEN

STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. ISMAIL SHAFEEU
 MINISTER OF PLANNING, HUMAN RESOURCES AND
 ENVIRONMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES
 AT THE
 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT
 (Cairo - 10 September, 1994.)

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and
 Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and a pleasure for me and my delegation to be here in
 Cairo, the city which is the cradle of civilization and which symbolizes
 like few other cities, the cultural, philosophical and religious
 diversity of humankind. It is most befitting that we have you Mr.
 President, to guide us in the monumental task ahead of us. You have with
 determination and foresight taken important initiatives in your country

which have inspired us all.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to you Mr. President and through you to the Government and the people of Egypt for the warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to us in the course of this conference . I also would like to recognize the important role played by Dr. Nafis Sadiq, Secretary-General of this conference in the extensive preparations for this Conference. I am confident that with such distinguished leadership, our collective and resolute effort will ensure the success of this Conference.

Mr. President,

We meet here in Cairo at a time of immense historic significance. A time which holds the promise of unprecedented achievements to be attained through international understanding and cooperation. The recognition of this increasing social, economic and environmental interdependence amongst nations provided the basis for the consensus reached in Rio and Vienna. It is also the basis on which this conference as well as forthcoming conferences in Copenhagen and Beijing will address their respective important global issues.

The issue of population and its impact on development is an issue that affects the entire global community.- The rate of growth of world population, the geographical distribution of that increase, and the potential for social, economic and environmental disaster that such unbalanced growth holds is truly alarming. The twin evils of poverty in the south, and excessive patterns of consumption in the north, have placed an unsustainable demand on the finite resource of this world. There is no doubt that the current patterns of consumption coupled with

an exploding global population pose a grave global threat which needs to be addressed quickly. This conference in Cairo thus provides us with an opportunity to make many of the decisions that could guarantee the survival of those generations who will follow us.

Mr. President,

Allow me to present to you the perspective of Maldives in this global scenario. Maldives is a small island developing state with a population of slightly under a quarter of a million; a size that many would not consider problematic by global standards. However, the geo-physical characteristics of the islands; the small land area, geographical dispersion and lack of known resources, combined with the rate at which the population is growing, pose severe obstacles in the nations quest for equitable and sustainable human development.

The rapid population growth in the Maldives is the outcome of persistent high fertility and declining mortality. The current rate of growth of the population is estimated at 3.22 percent. If the population growth were to continue at this rate Maldives will have doubled its present size of population by the year 2015. This growing population is spread unevenly over the islands, with the capital island, Male', having an estimated density of 36,000 persons per square kilometer, one of the highest densities in the world.

The Maldives views population issues and their resolution as an integral part of an overall developmental strategy and not as a problem that can be approached in an isolated framework. Thus, sustained economic growth, provision of educational facilities, and access to health care services are critical elements of the population strategy followed in my country. It is a strategy based on community involvement

with special emphasis on the involvement of disadvantaged groups.

We believe that the family is the basic unit of society. For any developmental programme to be effective, it must focus on the institution of the family. In the same manner population programmes also need to address the family unit in order to achieve satisfactory results. This requires special attention be given to the role of women, both in the family as well as in the society and enable them to make independent choices for their own well-being and that of their families.

Within this broad framework, we have been following in the Maldives, a number of specific programmes and activities to address population issues. These involve health services delivery and education and awareness programmes, with special emphasis on maternal and child health, provision of family planning services, counseling for married couples, and providing incentives for successful implementation of population programmes at the community level.

Population education has been successfully incorporated in the formal education curriculum of the Maldives. Awareness on population issues has been successfully promoted through the national radio which is accessible at the household level in the entire country, as well as through other media, community organizations and through a network of health personnel.

Awareness and counseling programmes are also being conducted by non-governmental organizations. Recent years have seen the emergence, and the increasing prominence of, non-governmental organizations in the country. The government encourages the active involvement of NGOs in the planning and management of population programmes. NGO involvement, while

covering the whole country, mainly focuses on management of population programmes in the outer islands.

Increasing the role of women as participants in and beneficiaries of mainstream development processes has been a high priority concern. A countrywide institutional framework for undertaking programmes aimed at addressing gender issues is in place. Women's Committees are well established at the island level, with strong links to the Ministry dealing with women's affairs at the central level. Numerous activities have been conducted to date, that have contributed towards elevating the status of women.

Mr. President

It would be pertinent to mention here the special difficulties that Maldives faces as a small developing island state, in undertaking the various developmental programmes. The widely scattered nature of the population across the archipelago poses several obstacles in the nation's quest for equitable and sustainable human development. Provision of basic services imposes a heavy fiscal burden on the government. Even in situations of economic affluence, provision of such services to tiny communities such as those that exist in many of the islands of Maldives, will be arduous if not impossible. For example, sophisticated medical equipment cannot be justified at the level of each island. As a consequence, the delay that occurs in the transportation of a patient to a location with such facilities greatly increases health risks. Given such a scenario, successful implementation of programmes requires technical and financial assistance of the international community in the immediate and medium term.

Mr. President

The Action Programme before this conference reflects many of the policies that are being followed in my country. We believe that the Action Programme in large part contains a developmental and holistic approach to population programmes and implementing mechanisms. This aspect is linked with the need to reconsider present consumption patterns, with a view to achieving sustainable socio-economic development. Additionally, the need to approach the issue of poverty and unequal access to resources on a global, regional and national basis, as an element of a population strategy cannot be over-emphasized.

However, while we believe in the broad aims and strategies espoused in the Action Programme it is important that we acknowledge that there is no single strategy that could be applied universally. The right of individual nations to define and implement population and developmental programmes in ways which are appropriate to their social, economic and cultural environment should be preserved. Any effort to impose policies that would counter the moral ethics of a society would not prove successful. The Programme should, therefore, allow nations to follow policies that do not contravene their cultural, moral and spiritual values. Moreover, it must respect the sovereign right of nations to work towards achieving the best balance of individual and societal rights and responsibilities in any given time frame.

Mr. President,

The Maldives supports efforts to preserve the family as the basic unit of the society and to eliminate all practices which endanger the health and well-being of women, adolescents, children and families. Although reproductive health services within the parameters defined by our moral

and ethical values are a key component of our primary health care and family planning programmes, as a muslim nation, whose laws, social norms and cultural traditions have emanated from the principles and percepts of Islam, the Maldives cannot support the promotion of abortion as a method of family planning.

Mr. President,

Agreement has been reached on several issues at this conference. But to arrive at consensus we need to demonstrate a higher degree of understanding and cooperation. We stand ready on our part to work towards achieving this goal.

I thank you.

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