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ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY, THE FIRST LADY OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF
 NIGERIA, MRS. MARYAN SANI ABACHA AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
 POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

CAIRO, EGYPT, SEPTEMBER 9, 1994

President of the Conference

Your Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am greatly honoured by the opportunity to address this highly
 esteemed International Conference on Population and Development (I.C.P.D)

and to bring to you the warm and fraternal greetings from the Government and people of Nigeria on this very important occasion.

That this Conference is taking place in this ancient country, Egypt, the cradle of world civilization, the history of human development would appear to have gone a full cycle. There cannot be a more symbolic and historical place to host this Conference than Egypt.

I will like to congratulate and thank His Excellency, President Hosni Mubarak and the great people of Egypt, for hosting this Conference and for according us this wonderful reception and hospitality. I would like to especially congratulate him on the United Nations award on population which he rightly deserves. Our sincere congratulations also go to the President of I.C.P.D., other elected officers and all those who have contributed to the organization of this conference

My congratulations also go to all of us here for witnessing this historic debate on the growth and development of mankind. It is on record that the collective wish of the governments and peoples of the world has led to a monumental and concerted effort in fashioning a negotiated consensus on population husbandry and sustainable economic growth in the years ahead. It is indeed heartening that this Conference affords us the opportunity to share experiences and information on an aspect of life which is vital to the development of mankind.

Permit me, Mr. President, to go down memory lane, to recall our experience and the events of two decades ago at a similar Conference in Bucharest in 1974 when Nigeria, the most populous African country, erroneously joined the chorus that "Development was the best contraceptive". We felt then that with development, fertility of the

people would naturally decline and population growth would be manageable and affordable<) in developing countries. We were proved wrong, for we had rapid economic growth in Nigeria with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of about nine per cent, rapid decline in death rates and increased high birth rates yet, our country witnessed the harvest of rapid population growth with its attendant consequences.

With the experience, therefore, in 1984 at the Mexico Conference, our message and undertaking were those of integration of population and Family Planning or child spacing programmes in health and socio-economic development policies. A life unexamined is not worth living. Every state of human development is subject to scrutiny, examination and reexamination without undermining values considered sacred to a people.

I am pleased to inform this august Conference that Nigeria has a comprehensive National Population Policy and has shared experiences with other African countries. However, in spite of the dawn of demographic and fertility transition in Nigeria, infant, child and maternal mortality rates are still unacceptably high. We have therefore come to this Conference with high expectation of global consensus-building and concerted action to improve the standard of living and quality of life of peoples in all nation states, particularly in the developing countries. The Nigerian delegation expects much from this Conference and is willing to contribute as much to the debate and negotiations based on human values and benefits.

Our views on some issues coming before this Conference are as follows:

1. That we endorse the Dakar/Ngor Declaration which contained the African governments' views on many issues coming before this conference.

2. We recommend the draft Programme of Action before us as the basis for consensus building towards solving the global problems of rapid population growth, environmental degradation and poverty.

3. We endorse the integration of population, environment, poverty alleviation and development strategies which place peoples welfare and well-being at the centre of development process.

4. We uphold gender-equity, which extends beyond equality to fairness and social justice as a pre-requisite to women empowerment and development and which should be promoted as a national and international policy.

5. We emphasize that women's health is generally interrelated with productive and sexual health as well as safe motherhood. Therefore, all measures to improve women's health will receive our commitment.

Our detailed points of views and proposed amendments to the draft Programme of Action are contained in our Country's Statement on the Draft Population Programme of Action.

I would like to use this opportunity Mr. President to intimate this international gathering of our concerted efforts in Nigeria to address family issues particularly on health and social welfare. We have designed a social crusade known as Family Support Programme (ESP). We realized that our problems as a nation cannot be divorced from the challenges facing our family system. We also believe that the family as a social unit must be supported morally and materially in order to continue to command the enormous influence on the personality development of children.

The Family Support Programme therefore is essentially a socio economic regeneration of society on the foundation of our rich cultures and traditions, strong family values, morality and discipline. It is envisaged among other things that through this crusade our adult population will acquire skills and learn relevant trades with the hope that at the end of the day the unemployed members of our families may be useful to themselves and others.

This crusade has so far garnered the support of Nigerian Government, all our womenfolk through their various democratic associations, individuals and groups. It is our hope that the successes we may achieve in this crusade will inspire other nations and the world at large.

Your Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, my address would be incomplete without stressing on a very vital ingredient of growth and development, PEACE. You will agree with me that this Conference and other similar international gatherings including our dreams of sustainable growth and development would be an exercise in futility if we do not address the issue of the promotion of peace among nations, states and within countries and territories. As you are aware, women and children are always the biggest casualties of war and crisis, it will not be out of place therefore that a woman is expressing concern about this human tragedy. May I appeal to the United Nations to set aside a day each year to be observed as international peace day for the promotion of global peace and resolution of conflicts.

Once more, Mr. President, Your Excellencies, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention.

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