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ADDRESS

BY

THE MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

OF THE KINGDOM OF NORWAY

KARI NORDHEIM-LARSEN

TO THE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

CAIRO, 9 SEPTEMBER 1994

- Check against delivery

We are gathered in Cairo to answer a moral call. Our decisions here and our willingness to follow up will be a test of our solidarity with present and future generations. So far the conference promises well.

Cairo should be remembered for what it will do for women. I cannot emphasize strongly enough that improving the status of women and particularly their education is probably the best of all strategies towards a reduction of birth rates. Investing in girls' education gives direct returns in the form of reduced fertility rate. A girl with secondary education will have a wider range of choices and opportunities in life than a girl with no education and typically marries and starts childbearing several years later. Globally, the impact of postponing marriage would be 1 billion people less when the global population stability is reached, than what is presently estimated.

I am particularly glad that we seem close to settling the abortion issue, which looked so difficult to handle before the conference opened. I do not think that any of us came to Cairo with the intention of advocating unlimited access to abortion and not to respect each country's sovereign right in this respect. I emphasize this since my own Prime Minister's opening speech has been misunderstood by some. But this is a conference on women's reproductive health. And in that context it would have been a grave omission to ignore the terrible fact that about 20 million women take recourse to abortions every year under circumstances that threaten the lives and

health of women. I have never understood how concern for this can possibly be interpreted to mean that we promote abortion or consider abortion as a means of family planning. In Norway we certainly do not promote abortion as a means of family planning, and in this respect we share the ethical concerns raised in this meeting.

Many others from all corners of the world have spoken eloquently on woman-centered development policies and the broader definition of population policies which is so forcefully emerging from the Cairo Conference. I will simply say that we wholeheartedly agree with this approach. It is almost with a sigh of relief that we now can conclude that these principles have been universally understood. Twenty years ago in Bucharest these ideas were barely touched upon, and few could explain what they meant in terms of practical policies.

I would like to say a few words about the role of men and their responsibilities. Women are taking on an increasingly important economic role as family supporters. Men, both in developed and developing countries, have been slow to adapt to this, in terms of taking their full responsibility as fathers and in relation to family planning. Irresponsible behavior lead both to transmission of infections - and to break-down of families.

If men do not take more responsibility for their sexual behavior and the health of their partners, and if they ignore their responsibilities as fathers, it will be impossible to cope not only with population growth, but also with sexually

transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

A major change in family patterns today is the increasing number of woman-headed families, and these families are among the poorest in the world. This is true in my own country and everywhere else, not the least in developing countries.

Poverty, and particularly among women, is both a cause and an effect of population growth.

Women and children suffer the heaviest burdens of poverty. But women are also powerful and creative agents of change, given the access to and control of resources. Improving the life conditions of the poor woman is the key to poverty alleviation for children and men as well.

There is no better insurance policy for developed and developing countries than funding population and family planning programmes. Much of the contribution must come from developing countries themselves. But industrialized countries must greatly improve their financial contributions. Norway has been one of the very few developed countries in meeting internationally agreed targets for both family planning aid and overall development assistance. We contribute 12 US dollars per capita towards family planning in the third world.

We have always, for more than twenty years, emphasized the broad approach that characterizes our Programme of Action here in Cairo. Family planning programmes, to be successful, are more than a question of distributing contraceptives. Family

planning should be seen in a broader context of improving the status of women, including their reproductive health, and reducing child mortality.

Larger portions of the development assistance need to be targeted towards meeting the basic needs of the poor, including increased allocation for population programmes. The United Nations Development Programme has suggested that 20 per cent of government expenditure in developing countries should be allocated to basic social services. At the same time industrialized countries are being requested to allocate 20 per cent of their development aid to meet these priority needs. These proposals are minimum requirements, and all donor countries should be in a position to reach this target.

Population policies must also take into account consumption patterns and distribution of wealth. An average person in North America and Europe consumes almost 20 times as much as a person in India or China, and 60 to 70 times more than a person in Bangladesh. It is simply impossible for the world as a whole to sustain a Western level of consumption for all. If 7 billion people were to consume as much energy and resources as we do in the West today we would need ten worlds, not one, to satisfy all our needs.

The vast majority who are poor make only a minimal claim on our natural resources, while the rich North is consuming in a few decades what has taken the planet billions of years to accumulate.

A single-minded strategy in countries with rapid population

growth is not enough. We need many strategies. One is the sexual and reproductive health approach. It is equally important to change consumption patterns in the North and achieve a better global distribution of wealth. Another strategy is to promote sustained economic growth in the South. Yet another is responsible governance and public policies everywhere.

Mr. President:

Cairo will be a test of our ability to shape the future and to fulfil our responsibilities for coming generations - to leave no less opportunity to them than those we inherited ourselves.

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