



94-09-12: Statement of Liberia, H.E.Mr. Philip Gadegbeku

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AS WRITTEN

MR. CHAIRMAN

HONORABLE DELEGATES,

I bring you fraternal greetings from the Liberian National
 Transitional Government and the people of Liberia. I wish to express my
 thanks and appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman, the Organizers of this all
 important Conference, the President and people of Egypt for the warm
 reception and hospitality accorded the Liberian delegation since our
 arrival here. Our presence here in spite of the many problems at home
 speaks of the importance we attach to this conference.

Mr. Chairman, this presentation is threefold: first I will give
 you a picture of political development at home as it relates to the
 peace process. Secondly, I will acquaint the conference on the steps
 taken thus far by the Liberian Government to implement population
 policies and family planning programs; finally, I will address myself to

a number of issues contained in the Draft Program of Action.

One of the cardinal principles of the International Conference on Population and Development is the emphasis placed on human beings as the focus for sustainable development. However, the civil war, which has engulfed our country during the past four years subjected us to untold suffering and misery, while many more persons continue to die. The warring factions have shown no regard for the people's right to liberty and security. It is estimated that the four years of war has led to the loss of over 150,000 lives.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it will be recalled that in an attempt to bring peace to the devastated country of Liberia, the Cotonou Accord was signed on July 25, 1993 between the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) and the two warring factions, United Liberation Movement of Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO) and the National Patriot Front of Liberia (NPFL). This Accord called for the establishment of a government of inclusion.

Accordingly, the five-man Council of State and the 37-member Transitional Legislative Assembly (TLA) were inducted into office on March 7, 1994. Presently, the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG) is now fully constituted and functioning, with the three parties to the Accord represented in all three branches of the government as well as on the Ad-Hoc Elections Commission in consonance with the Cotonou Accord.

Even though such a government has been formed, the LNTG is far behind in the discharge of its mandate due to the uncooperative attitude of the warring factions. For example, it is encountering problems

facilitating disarmament; furthermore, some of these warring factions that are signatories to the Accord are laying down preconditions for disarmament which are not in the accord. In view of these obstacles, the LNTG is facing difficulties in repatriating and resettling Liberian refugees and internally displaced persons; it is also facing difficulties in extending authorities in the counties.

In view of the intransigence of the warring factions, the unarmed civilians have decided to convene a conference to review the situation and come up with a new course of action to help put an end to the carnage in Liberia. Such a conference is being attended by all interest groups, political parties, Liberians in general and the international community. The conference, slated to last from August 24 - September 3, 1994, is being held against the background of the following factors:

1. The commitment of Liberians themselves to see an end to this nightmare;
2. Donor fatigue which is resulting due to the fact that resources are being spent with the involvement of the international community and the stalemate still continues; and
3. our brothers and sisters of the West African Peace Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) continue to make sacrifices. Countries in the sub-region with their own internal problems continue to utilize their meager resources and their call for Liberians to strongly support these efforts by taking the lead in this conflict resolution to avoid the possibility of ECOMOG pulling out.

In spite of all the problems confronting the Liberian National Transitional Government occasioned by the continuing fighting in the

country, and the lack of financial resources, serious attempts have been made aimed at implementing and supporting population programs. The first major population-related activity undertaken by government was the reconstitution of the National Population Commission in 1991, along with the Secretariat and Technical Committee. The commission has earlier facilitated the development of a policy geared towards the achievement of population goals and objectives. That policy which represented a national consensus of a broad spectrum of the population was approved along with an act amending the new executive law to create a National Population Commission within the Executive Branch of Government in July 1988. The main thrust of the policy remains the lowering of death and population growth rates through the provision of primary health care, family planning and other voluntary fertility regulation methods that are in consonance with the attainment of the socioeconomic development goals of the nation.

Ladies and gentlemen, in preparation for this conference, Liberia participated in the Third African Population Conference held in Dakar, Senega, in December 1992, at which time the Dakar/Ngor Declaration on Population, Family and Sustainable Development was adopted. The declaration, among other things assessed the achievements, constraints and implications of population policies, the impact of the economic crisis and structural adjustment programs on family survival strategies and on the ability of African governments to make satisfactory progress in population policy formulation and implementation.

At the national level, Liberia undertook a number of activities. These are:

1. The establishment of the National Committee to serve as focal

point for the conference preparatory activities in 1992;

2. The establishment of a local consultancy group to draft the national population report. The report was prepared and submitted in September, 1993;

3. In keeping with the National Population Policy, the Liberian Government has taken the necessary steps aimed at the establishment of a Women Affairs Coordination Unit which will provide the framework that integrates women and children matters including all gender issues into the development process. Meanwhile, efforts are being made by government to establish a Bureau of Women Affairs which shall advance women's rights, including patterns of fertility behavior; and

4. A National Sensitization Symposium was held on August 17, 1994 to sensitize the populace about the forthcoming ICPD, its goals and objectives and to solicit national consensus on some critical issues in the draft program on action which are pending for final debate at this conference.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, my delegation is happy to report that at the close of the one-day sensitization symposium the participants resolved that the Draft Program of Action is comprehensive and forward looking. Based on our national development policies and population programs such languages as reproductive right, sexual and reproductive health and family planning, gender equality, equity and empowerment of women are in line with our national population and development policies.

Therefore my delegation supports the retainment of such languages

and related phrases where they have been conspicuously bracketed for final resolution at this conference. However, my delegation

wishes to categorically reaffirm that Liberia prohibits the promotion of abortion as a contraceptive method of family planning.

Furthermore, we want to particularly emphasize that specific measures be devised and adopted for education of girls.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, as Liberia gradually moves from emergency programs to those of developmental nature for the population, there is a greater need to address issues of sustainable development, psycho-social readjustment and comprehensive awareness campaign to redirect the thinking of the traumatic minds of war-torn Liberian youth through well planned counselling and readjustment programs.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we would like to state that in view of the prevailing status in implementing population policy and programs, particularly in the face of inadequate human, financial and physical resources as well as the difficulties in overcoming the structural rigidity of externally imposed dependent economic system, priorities have to be set so as to highlight the most achievable goals of the population and socio-economic development plan.

The continued support of UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, USAID, and the international donor community during this critical period in Liberia is most crucial.

I thank you.

COUNTRY STATEMENT

REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA 1994

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