

As written

DRAFT

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FINLAND

Madame/Mr. President,
distinguished delegates,

As a member of the European Union, Finland fully shares the views expressed in the statement made earlier by Germany on behalf of the EU. The principles and priorities put forward in that statement are in close alignment with those of the Finnish government. This holds true especially for what was said of the special needs of adolescents and the importance of addressing the issue of HIV/AIDS and STD's in general.

I will take this opportunity only to highlight some of our national experiences in the area of population and development. In the following, I will briefly present some key issues which perhaps best exemplify the Finnish way of thinking.

Finnish population policy is based on a holistic, comprehensive approach to population issues. The Finnish government has, in fact, not produced any official policy documents stating its goals, quantitative or otherwise, in this sector. Instead, population policy is seen as an internal part of all social policy. Elements of population policy are incorporated in legislation dealing with health and family issues, and in legislation regarding e.g. gender equality, immigration and children.

Both in domestic social and health policy and in Finnish international development cooperation, particular emphasis is given to providing universal access to comprehensive and integrated welfare services. Social and health services should be seen as an essential component of public welfare policy. In the area of population policy key sectors in Finland include, among others, the provision of family planning services, sex education classes in schools and an extensive network of maternal and children's health care services. We understand that the organisation of social and health services related to reproduction may vary from country to country according to economic, social and other circumstances; their universal availability, however, should remain the key target.

Another sector which is accorded special attention is the promotion of equality between women and men. In population policy, this means promoting measures that enable parents to combine work and family life, e.g. providing day care facilities, free school lunches, etc., and furthering the empowerment of women in general by encouraging participation in social and political decision-making processes. Perhaps even more importantly, it also includes involving men more directly in child care through, e.g. encouraging fathers to take advantage of the statutory parental leave system, to attend the birth, etc.

In Finland, as in all Nordic countries, there is also a long tradition of providing reproductive health services and information specially geared towards adolescents. Particular emphasis is given to making sure that adolescents receive all the help, material services and support they need to make informed choices about their sexuality. This is possible only if parents and society as a whole accept and understand the fact that young people are sexually active. Adolescent sexuality should not be seen as a threat or a problem but rather as a fact of life.

Madame/Mr. President,

The adoption of this integrated approach to population issues coincided in Finland with the formation of the current welfare system in the 1940's to 1960's. It is because of this long tradition that Finland was in the privileged position of having already achieved the main goals of the ICPD Programme of Action before the Cairo conference of 1994.

Throughout this decade, the same holistic approach has also been at the heart of Finnish international development cooperation policy. We are very pleased to be able to say that even during the cuts of all public expenditure due to the severe financial recession experienced in Finland in the early 1990's, population assistance was still maintained at a relatively high level. In the studies that have been published, most recently by Population Action International, Finnish assistance has received almost top ratings.

It remains the firm commitment of the Finnish government to work for the high level - both quantitative and qualitative - of our own aid effort and to maintain as a priority the crosscutting themes of the global agenda, including the goals confirmed by the ICPD five years ago. We will continue to engage our resources for the **fulfilment** and sustainability of the Cairo Programme of Action, in cooperation with the international community. Also, within the prospects for continued increases, we will work towards re-achieving the agreed targets for the total ODA of Finland.