

Statement to The Hague Forum, 8-12 February 1999

As written

(Translated from the French)

**Speech delivered by the French Ambassador
at The Hague Forum of February 1999
on the Five-Year Review and Appraisal
of the Implementation of the IPCD Programme of Action**

Mr Chairman,

I should first like to thank the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) – in particular UNFPA Executive Director Dr Nafis Sadik – for organizing this Forum on operational review at national level, and the government of the Netherlands, which is hosting this Forum.

We are now embarking on the final stage in the five-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the programme of action launched by 184 countries at the Cairo Conference in 1994. The French delegation welcomes this opportunity of sharing its operational experience in a declaration complementary to that of the Presidency of the European Union.

Action in respect of population issues requires both a strong political will and an organized civil society. It must ensure that dialogue and consultation prevail over ideological approaches. It is closely linked to the problematics of the role and place of women in society.

Encouraging changes have taken place in France with regard to maternal health since the 1994 Cairo Conference. The government launched a plan of action for the period 1995-2000 aimed at reducing the maternal mortality rate and improving monitoring of pregnancies, particularly in the case of migrant, vulnerable populations. Maintaining social security coverage for all has resulted in improved perinatal health indicators.

Moreover, legislation on contraception and termination of pregnancy has helped to reduce the number of abortions and, above all, the number of deaths caused by abortions carried out in bad conditions. Very active HIV/AIDS campaigns were also launched, with adolescents as a prime target.

Fighting against practices harmful to women's health is still a great challenge in France, notably as regards certain disadvantaged groups which keep carrying out female genital mutilations. Far-reaching action in maternity child welfare centres, targeting women and families, has made it possible to curb this scourge. Where necessary, such preventive action also includes advertising during the few, albeit exemplary trials resulting at times in suspended prison sentences or in non-suspended imprisonment in the case of reoffenders.

French Deputies (members of parliament) play an important role in introducing the Cairo Programme of Action into national legislation. In partner countries, as in France, governments, MPs and NGOs are conducting converging and complementary actions. France thus proposes to its partners support for their population programmes, in areas where its own experience may prove useful. French actions overseas were speeded up through anti-HIV/AIDS programmes. Our fight against this pandemic focuses on prevention as a matter of priority. Similar campaigns were launched by partner countries which did not always prioritise family planning. Sex education and information are now possible in partner countries, including in primary schools. France has adopted an integrated approach to family planning and HIV/AIDS prevention by capitalising on the closely linked messages of safe sex and responsible fertility.

It is necessary to continue the efforts undertaken at world level since 1994 to address fertility decline, with which couples and women, as well as players in developing countries, ought to be credited. These efforts make it possible to adopt a more dispassionate approach to further challenges such as the ageing of the population and international migrations which raise the issue of necessary intergenerational and intercountry solidarity.

France has, over the past five years and in the face of budgetary restraint, sustained a significant official development assistance effort which made it the second-biggest aid donor in volume terms in 1997. As regards population issues France, in the name of the principle of complementarity, has for the most part used the Community channel: France thus contributes more than FF100m per annum to European Commission population programmes, in addition to French bilateral population aid amounting to FF95m per annum.

France's contribution to the UNFPA rose from FF3.5m in 1995 to FF6m in 1998 and is expected to reach FF7m in 1999. Furthermore, the government will co-finance, in the amount of FF10m, two bi/multilateral programmes elaborated in collaboration with the UNFPA in Madagascar and Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr Chairman,

Many developing countries have suffered from the global financial crisis and the decline in the official development assistance allocated to population programmes. This change is a retrospective confirmation of the position described by France at the Cairo Conference, to the effect that the world population problem cannot be solved by

advocating the offer of contraceptives funded irregularly by foreign countries. On the contrary, progress will be achieved through development, improved distribution of wealth and access to contraception viewed as an integral part of development policies freely chosen by States. Development policies are multi-faceted and should in particular give priority to education for all, especially for girls. In this respect, France takes pride in having helped to introduce a chapter on education in the IPCD Programme of Action.

I hope that this Forum will enable us to grow richer by drawing on our respective experiences, and I am convinced that it will prove extremely useful in preparing the General Assembly special session to be held next June.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.