

# COLOMBIA



COLOMBIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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**STATEMENT**  
**BY THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA,**  
**H.E. GUSTAVO BELL LEMUS,**  
**AT THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**  
**CONVENED TO THE REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE PROGRAM OF**  
**ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON**  
**POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

**New York, 30 June 1999**

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Mr. President:

It is my honor and privilege as Vice-President of Colombia to address this historic session of the General Assembly. It constitutes an important opportunity to give new impetus to the efforts by the international community in the field of population and development, vital for humankind.

In 1994, at the Cairo Conference, we committed ourselves to implement an ambitious Program of Action, aimed at addressing the challenges of population growth and directing such growth in accordance with the economic and social developmental needs in our countries.

Today, after five years, we can recognize with satisfaction the progress made and also the long way still to go. The universal principles and ethical values that inspired the Cairo Conference have helped us both as a fundamental guide for action and as an incentive to face those demanding challenges. Yet, we need a new political impulse, a profound commitment, so as to ensure that the high ideals we all share be translated into practical results and better living conditions for huge sectors of the world's population.

Mr. President:

The Government of Colombia is committed itself in a great effort for social change. Our National Development Plan "Change to Build Peace" is founded on this developmental perspective. Within it, the priorities of population policies occupy a special place. Colombia has reached significant achievements in terms population stabilization. Over the last few decades we have been able to reduce population growth considerably. Decreased fertility rates, better health care and disease prevention have helped to achieve greater life expectancy levels. Infant mortality rate in Colombia is notoriously lower than the world average.

Such factors as the provision of reproductive health services, the active collaboration between Government and NGOs, the role of women in society, the promotion of gender equity and equality, the respect for reproductive and sexual rights, and increased access to education and information, have been decisive to those achievements.

The National Constitution of Colombia contains clear provisions on reproductive rights. The Parliament has adopted social security laws based on these concepts. Furthermore,

the National Development Plan contains precise actions to consolidate reproductive and sexual health programs, within a clear gender perspective. All norms and political decisions in this field have been adopted in Colombia within the framework agreed upon in the Cairo Conference.

Today, Colombia is the third Country in Latin American and the Caribbean in terms of population size. It stands out an outstanding place at the international level due to its demographic transition progress. We have overcome almost all thresholds agreed at Cairo.

On the other side, Colombia is one of the leader countries in the developing world in the area of south-south cooperation on population matters. We have participated actively in the Partners in Population and Development Cooperation Program. In implementing this initiative, and thanks to the combination of national efforts and international support, we are providing cooperation to other countries through training programs on reproductive and sexual health. Direct participation of the non-governmental sector in these activities has been an important factors of success.

Of course we still have many challenges to overcome. For that reason, I would like to reaffirm the commitment of my country with the goals and objectives adopted at Cairo, as well as with those further actions we will agree during this Special Session of the General Assembly. We will keep in Colombia a population policy framework consistent with those goals and the economic and social development requirements. Furthermore, the achievements in this demanding field do not depend only on our domestic efforts. Support by the international community is crucial, especially through the mobilization of financial resources, human development resources and capacity building.

Mr. President:

The document that will be adopted at the end of this Assembly constitutes, from the point of view of Colombia, an important platform to reinforce the "momentum" and deepen the political will towards the fulfillment of the goals contained in the Programme of Action. Allow me to underline in this sense, some considerations that we believe are essential to ensure a successful implementation of the Programme:

1. We must insist in the definition of population as a basic component of development strategies. Without failing to recognize its demographic dimension and its importance from the human health perspective, it is indispensable that future actions in this area be undertaken in the context of wider commitments adopted on international cooperation and sustainable development. In this line, actions aimed at compensating the social impact caused by the recent international financial crisis particularly in the fields of education, health and population programs, demand the highest priority.
2. Legitimate and universally accepted results could not be reach without clear policies and concrete results on international migration. Restrictions in this area are one of

the most serious, unjustified and still unexplained asymmetries in the globalization process.

3. It is necessary to remove the economic and social barriers that prevent the full enjoyment of reproductive and sexual rights and sexual health. This condition is indispensable to guarantee effective population policies based on gender equality and equity.
4. We must also adopt more decisive measures in favor of adolescents and elderly people. The first of them, constitute a powerful resource to future development in our countries; in their hands rest the future of reproductive health in the world. Elderly people are an increasing portion of population and require now much greater attention and social sensibility than before.
5. Reducing maternal mortality rates require, likewise, a decisive collective commitment and wider international support. Urgent actions are required to improve health and nutrition conditions of women, diminish unwanted pregnancies and guarantee safe and effective family planning methods.
6. Actions aimed at strengthening cooperation between governmental and Non-Governmental actors should also been reinforced. Active participation of NGOs will be increasingly important to achieve successful results in the implementation of the Program of Action.
7. There is a need to give greater support by the international community to South-South cooperation efforts. The results achieved with the Partners in Population and Development Cooperation Program constitute a positive experience which deserve a firm support.
8. Lastly, credibility on the Cairo Program of Action in terms of mobilizing international financial resources, area in which results fall very short of expectations against the objectives agreed in Cairo, must be restored. In this context, increasing resources for the United Nations Population Fund is an unavoidable obligation.

Mr. President:

Already at the outset of the new century, when the world population is at a few weeks from reaching the historic mark of 6 billion of human beings, and in the middle of the silent revolution of the last decades demographic transition, is now the time for the international community to foster further actions, to reinforce its leadership and willingness. It is the time for action. The decisions to be adopted by this Session of the Assembly will affect the quality of life of the generations to come. Lets do not hesitate in assuming this noble political commitment.

Thank you, Mr. President.