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STATEMENT BY
H.E. MINISTER OF HEALTH
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TWENTY-FIRST SPECIAL SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THE REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT
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Mr. President,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My delegation would like to extend my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, and to the other distinguished delegates elected to the Bureau.

I welcome the opportunity to address this eminent audience on the occasion of the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly devoted to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

International cooperation has been strengthened during the previous period of approximately six months through the various recent meetings on population such as the Hague Forum, and the 32nd meeting of the Commission of Population and Development have paved the way to this 21st Special Session of the General Assembly.

Back in 1994, the ICPD in the first place redefined the concept of population, putting it in direct relation with development, especially sustainable development. The Conference reaffirmed the importance of universally recognized human rights and reproductive rights.

The most important and vital issues such as overall high rates of population growth, demographic aging, changing family structure, urban agglomeration and other major population issues were put on the global agenda. The result was the Programme of Action which articulated a comprehensive approach to issues of population and development and was accepted by a broad consensus of 179 countries. Thus, five years after we are summoned here to reaffirm the ICPD mandate and examine the progress in its implementation.

A gender perspective was included into population policies and programmes. The Programme of Action calls on governments to ensure protection of human rights of women and girls through legal mechanisms and gender-sensitive policies in order to achieve gender equality and equity. It was further strongly recommended that full participation and representation of women at all levels of political and public life be ensured by the governments. All forms of gender-based discrimination should be eliminated.

Some of the key achievements certainly **include** poverty rate reduction, health and education improvement, lower mortality rates, greater accessibility of family planning methods.

Mr. President,

Much remains to be done and progress has sometimes been limited by new challenges such as the AIDS epidemic, the Asian economic crisis with its global impact, political instability and war. The imbalance between demographic rates and social, economic and environmental goals points to a very diversified demographic picture of the countries around the world.

Nevertheless, we live in a demographically unprecedented time when transition from high rates of fertility and mortality to low rates is a reality.

Allow me to emphasize that during the last fifty years, the world has seen rapid population growth which has occurred largely in less developed countries. In the period of a quarter of a century the world's population has grown by unprecedented 2 billion people. This year, the population of the world will reach the historic level of 6 billion people. At the same time, more developed countries are facing a trend of lower fertility and mortality rates due to improved health care and longer life expectancy.

The influence these factors project on development is immense, while interdependency between the economic and social spheres, as well as health and environment has become crucial.

The partnership of governments, non-governmental organizations, and other groups of civil society plays an important role in the ICPD implementation process.

Furthermore, at a time when the economic and demographic situation is a global issue, it is important to strengthen international cooperation in this inevitable process of globalization, to exchange ideas and know-how, in the spirit of consensus-building, to reach the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life of present and future generations set by the ICPD.

As a country with an economy in transition, Croatia confronts all of the issues I have mentioned, although in its own specific mix.

With regard to the Cairo Document Croatian Government established the National Commission for Equality. National Policy of Equality was adopted in 1997. The National Policy provides for specific measures for achieving particular goals in the areas of political decision making, the economic position of women, health care, education, human rights of women and violence against women in war and peace.

Croatia belongs to the group of countries which are concerned with their low rate of population growth and its consequences for long-term human and socio-economic development. The present demographic situation is the result of a steady decline of fertility and a low natural increase, a negative migration balance, the consequence of two World Wars, and especially of the recent war of aggression imposed against the country in the 1990s.

In terms of spatial distribution, urban agglomeration presents another significant problem in the country. Entire regions have been affected by depopulation, whereby population is concentrated in and around a small number of urban centers. Also, Croatian islands are faced with negative demographic indicators. In 1997, the National Island Development Programme was introduced as a means to abolish distinctions in spatio-demographic development and achieve a well-balanced regional development.

It has to be noted that the aggression against Croatia in early ninties caused a natural decrease of population, direct loss of human life and a great number of the displaced and refugees. Precise population figures will be available after the 2001 census. In the meantime, international financial assistance has been sporadic and at low levels. It is mainly through the efforts and investments of the Croatian Government that these problems were addressed, while the international assistance has, so far, remained very limited.

To avert these and other negative trends, in 1996 the Government adopted the National Demographic Development Programme which envisages a series of measures for fertility rehabilitation and social assistance in line with the Cairo document. A balanced population growth and its integrated social approach is a priority for the overall development of the country.

The reform of health care system in Croatia is under way with the goal of decreasing costs by reorganization of the system, although not at the expense of the health care user. A credit line was approved by the World Bank for that purpose, and the first project has been successfully implemented.

Reproductive health care is accessible through the primary health-care system in Croatia. Among the priorities are prenatal mortality rate reduction, diagnosis of risky pregnancies, and promotion of breast-feeding. Special attention is being given to women's health care related to pregnancy, delivery, and post-natal care. In 1996 Croatia has recorded the lowest maternal mortality rate of 1.86 *per* 100,000 live births.

In 1997 the prenatal mortality rate *per* 1,000 live births was 5.78. The lowest infant mortality rate was recorded in 1996(8.0 *per* 1,000 live births), whereas in 1998 it was 8.23 *per* 1,000 live births.

In spite of all difficulties caused by war and the process of transition in Croatia, statistical health indicators remained favorable. Within the framework of the National Plan of Action various activities are under way with the goal to improve the overall health situation. The Plan is based upon the World Health Organization strategy "Health for All".

Given the complexity of the factors that affect trends and patterns of fertility, mortality and migration, the delegation of Croatia submitted national report on these issues at the Regional population meeting organized in December 1998 in Budapest. The report is published on the Internet and is available in the materials which my delegation has distributed.

Croatia is one of the countries which has experienced large number of the aged in population. According to 1991 census the share of population over 65 was 13.1%. This year, declared the International Year of Older Persons by the General Assembly, the Government has established a national committee and adopted programme of activities to improve the social care of the elderly so as to address the issues of the quality of life of older persons. Great efforts have been also invested recently to **reform** pension funds, health and social welfare system in Croatia at the legislative and implementation level.

Adequate financial resources are necessary to achieve the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action at the national as well as international level. Leadership and commitment towards programme implementation remain the keys.

We strongly believe that the future Key Actions which we are going to adopt today at the end of the 21st Special Session of the General Assembly will give a new impetus to worldwide efforts to implement the goals and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action in the pursuit of balanced population growth and sustainable development.

Thank you Mr. President.