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**THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

STATEMENT BY

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AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

AT THE SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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30 JUNE 1999

Mr. President,

My country has aligned itself with and supports fully the positions expressed by the European Union. In addition we would like to put forward a few remarks regarding our national strategies and experiences on the issues concerned.

At the outset, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Ambassador Chowdhury for his effective and wise leadership during the **PrepCom**, as well as Mrs. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of UNFPA for her valuable input.

Mr. President,

The ICPD Programme of Action has been a valuable tool for policy makers and planners on how population policies and programmes should be formulated and implemented. In essence it moved away from standard population control policies to a more human rights based approach covering issues relating to sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality, the empowerment of women etc.

Recent demographic changes in Cyprus concern the drop of fertility to levels just below replacement (2.00 in 1997), the increase of life expectancy to 75 for males and 80 for females and the declining trend in population growth at about 1% every year. Population growth is due both to natural increase and to the positive net migration balance. The population is aging; the proportion of elderly population aged 65 and over increased to 11.2% in 1997 while the proportion of children below 15 decreased to 24.1%. The working age population is also aging. Although, aging does not mean an old population, still my Government is worried about the problems that come in its way and in particular the social and economic implications.

Mr. President,

The population characteristics of Cyprus are the result of the satisfactory health, education, nutrition, sanitary conditions and human resource development prevailing in Cyprus and, therefore, based on public efforts and the priority placed on these issues by the Government.

In Cyprus most of the measures included in the Programme of Action have begun to be implemented long before ICPD, through the formulation of economic and social development plans. Due to its small size and lack of primary resources, Cyprus economic development rests on the full exploitation of its human resources. This objective forms an integral part of development plans and is in line with the overall objective of improving the level of social welfare and particularly of women. For this purpose the Government assists invariably the expansion and improvement of child-care facilities in order to assist women to seek paid employment. It also provides vocational and other training for women, especially in rural areas, to engage in full-time employment.

Issues relating to gender equality and the empowerment of women, are also high in the priorities of my country. The Cyprus Government has taken measures to eliminate violence and discrimination against women. An important landmark in this context was the ratification by Cyprus of the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which provides the framework of current Government policy towards women's issues. There is now legislation in force which provides equal pay for equal work, guarantees maternity leave, prohibits the dismissal of women as a result of pregnancy, extends equal parental care to both parties, protects women from all forms of violence, safeguards the right of women to property and provides women equal rights with men with regard to tax matters; also the Cyprus Government has established the machinery required to promote women's equality and human rights.

In the field of education, girls enjoy equal opportunities with boys, while school curricula have been made more gender sensitive with the inclusion of relevant subjects, while sexual education is taught at schools as a hidden subject.

Education, which is provided free of charge, absorbs about 13% of all Government outlays, while as a proportion of GDP it reaches the 4.5% level; both figures compare very favorably with those of developed countries.

Mr. President,

In Cyprus reproductive health is integrated into the primary health care system, and is provided free of charge by public sector institutions and at affordable rates by the private sector. The total expenditure dedicated for health purposes, from all sources, is of the order of 6% of GDP, or 16% of all public expenditure which also compares very favorably with most developed countries.

All women have access to public pre-natal, and post-natal care, including safe delivery, while the private sector is very active on pregnancy testing, anti-natal screening for sexually transmitted diseases, including Hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS, safe delivery, treatment of infertility, safe abortion (within the legal provisions) and advise on contraception. Other services provided include, cancer screening of the breast and uterus, treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, including treatment for HIV/AIDS.

In Cyprus family planning issues are entrusted to specialist doctors in the private sector, but more so to an NGO subsidized mainly by the Government. The services provided are not confined within the narrow meaning of population control, but also include access to information relating to sexual and reproductive rights, family law, sexual education, including health issues, reproductive choice and gender

equality; it also provides counseling on sexual relations, abortion, and more recently on the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Mr. President,

The Programme of Action makes reference to issues of migration and problems associated with refugees and displaced persons. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and articles 5 and 7 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court adopted in Rome on 17 July 1998 are unequivocal in holding that compulsory population transfers constitute not only internationally wrongful acts but also international crimes. Cyprus is a country which is witnessing the inhumanity of the refugee-problem since one-third of its population has been displaced from ancestral homes as a result of the foreign invasion of 1974. We believe that the right of refugees to return to their homes and properties in safety and dignity is an inalienable right based on international law and upheld by international jurisprudence and UN practice.

Mr. President,

In the last two decades or so, Cyprus has been experiencing an inflow of Cypriot expatriates and their families, as well as an influx of foreign workers coming to work on a temporary basis.

The return of Cypriot expatriates is actively encouraged by the Cyprus Government in an effort to address the overall labor shortage problem. This has been made possible through financial and other incentives.

During the last two decades Cyprus has also had the experience of transit migrants due to the war in Lebanon and most recently the Gulf War in 1991.

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Cyprus, due to its smallness and lack of absorptive capacity cannot implement permanent immigration schemes. Hence, illegal immigrants are either repatriated, or sent to another country of their own choice while some of them are accepted as genuine refugees and they are given political asylum. In this regard allow me to mention that Cyprus has ratified the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees. Also my Government has initiated a dialogue and negotiations, at bilateral level, for the signing of readmission agreements with some of its neighbors.

It is the view of my Government that action 'is urgently needed at the international level to establish a new code of conduct for managing migration, including the safeguarding of the rights of migrants, the prevention of trafficking in migrants and especially the exploitation of women and children.

Mr. President,

I would like to conclude my intervention by saying that my country in its population policy is guided by the ICPD Programme of Action and has gone a long way towards implementing it. It has devoted, even before ICPD, substantial resources for health, education and other social services. Due to its small population base, issues relating to population will continue to be a matter of great priority for Cyprus and in particular, the fertility rate, the implications of population aging, illegal migration, health issues and in particular HIV/AIDS and gender equality. To overcome these problems cooperation at the international level is necessary and should be actively promoted.

Thank you Mr. President.