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**Twenty-First Special Session of the UN General Assembly
for the overall review and appraisal of the implementation
of the Programme of Action of the International
Conference on Population and Development**

Statement by

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Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic

New York, July 2, 1999

Mr. President,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Czech Republic aligned itself with the statement presented on Wednesday on behalf of European Union and we fully support the main thrusts of the EU position at this Special Session. This allows me to confine myself now just to a brief country-specific information. More can be found in the Czech National Report on implementation of Cairo Programme of Action, the English version of which has been made available to delegates this morning.

Mr. President,

Since 1990, the Czech Republic has undergone and is still undergoing many structural changes. These changes are connected with transforming the political system as well as with introducing socially and environmentally sensitive market economy. And despite the difficulties accompanying the transition, the Czech Republic now ranks among countries with deep respect for basic human, social and cultural rights of all citizens. This respect is reflected not only in the rule of law, but above all in the real life of citizens. Total expenditures on social protection (including health care) and on education in the Czech Republic represent nearly 30 % of its GDP.

In the Czech Republic, the gender equity is regarded as a natural and basic principle. Equal rights for men and women are guaranteed by the Constitution and this is also reflected in a gender-neutral wording of all legal acts. In addition to the gender-neutral legislation, the equal status and high economic activity of women (the average economic activity rate is 52 %) are attributable to equal education opportunities, provided free-of-charge by all types of state schools including universities. And, as a result, the average level of education of women is higher than that of men.

Supporting families with children is a long-standing tradition in the Czech Republic, and is based on social laws, family law and labour law (which take into account needs of mothers and fathers care of small children). Parents caring for children with disabilities have additional support.

In the 1990s, the demographic picture of the Czech Republic has markedly changed. As a result of long-term gradual ageing of population, and of changing demographic behaviour, the country is losing its population by natural change from 1994 onwards. At the same time, the average life expectancy has been increasing significantly. Between 1990 and 1997, the average life expectancy has increased by nearly 4 years (from 67.5 to 71.1 years) for men and by nearly 3 years (from 75.4 to 78.1 years) for women, respectively.

The generally accepted explanation of the decrease in birth rate is in particular the postponement of first marriages and child-births until a later age and the widespread use of contraception in recent years. However, there are also the well-known social changes, such as the higher level of education and employment of women, individualization and a broader range of opportunities for young people. The current depopulation trend is likely to continue also in the future.

One of the top priorities of the "National Health Programme", launched in 1992, is women's health care. Many its projects focus on specific groups of women and their occupational health. A great deal of attention is paid to reproductive health, where projects seek to promote medical education, various consulting services, education towards parentage and family planning, nutrition during pregnancy and breast-feeding, prevention of breast tumors, contraception methods, and prevention of sexually transmittable diseases. Other medical/preventive programmes supported by the Ministry of Health are devoted, for example, to healthy lifestyle or prevention of malignant tumors. Mass media and professional non-governmental institutions become ever-increasingly involved in these activities.

Pre-natal and post-natal care focusing on babies and infants has a long-standing tradition in the Czech Republic, and is manifested by a continuously declining infant mortality rate (from 20.2 per 1,000 of live newly-borns in 1970 to 5.9 in 1997), as well as one of the lowest maternal mortality rates worldwide. The campaign and knowledge of benefits of breast-feeding have been rapidly expanding and improving.

For the time being, the HIV/AIDS morbidity rate trend is not too alarming for the Czech Republic. National health authorities have adopted a medium-term plan of prevention of the disease. An inter-ministerial body, the National Commission for HIV/AIDS-Related Issues, and a network of counseling and testing points (cost-free and anonymous) have been established. There are many free AIDS-counseling telephone numbers operated by non-governmental organizations. The Czech Republic co-operates with the UNAIDS Programme and runs its own national programme.

The Czech Republic has become in the 1990s a target country for labor immigration and for refugees. As a response, we are now developing capacities to guarantee the immigrants and refugees the rights embedded in relevant international agreements and standards.

Generally, the European social model applied in the EU member states among which the Czech Republic intends to rank in the near future inspires us in shaping our system of social protection. The Czech Republic has already succeeded in many aspects in harmonizing the transition to democracy and to the market economy with a **sufficient** level of social solidarity. The basic principle of the government policy in this area is to ensure equal opportunities of citizens.

Mr. President,

In conclusion let me turn to international arena again and to express my delegation's satisfaction with the results achieved in these most **difficult** negotiations. As this review exercise over the Cairo Programme of Action has shown - progress is rather slow, but it has no alternative! We are moving in the right direction and my delegation thanks to all who have contributed in a constructive manner to successful conclusion and outcome of our meeting.

Thank you.