



STATEMENT

Special Session of the General Assembly for the review and appraisal  
of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the  
International Conference on Population and Development

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Ms. Kirsti Lintonen  
Under-Secretary of State  
Development Cooperation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

On behalf of the European Union

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Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European Countries associated with the European Union, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Associated Country of Cyprus align themselves with this statement.

Since the outgoing Presidency, Germany, has already made a statement on behalf the Union, it is not our intention to repeat what has been said before, but rather to take a look ahead, at the future implementation of the Cairo agenda. Also, we would like to examine the links that exist between the ICPD and the wider development efforts we are engaged in as we approach the new millennium.

There is one thing that merits repeating, however, and that is our deep appreciation for the excellent work done by all of those who have been involved in the preparations of this Special Session. Our sincere thanks go especially to the Population Division and Mr. Chamie, to UNFPA and Dr. Sadik, and last but definitely not least to Ambassador Chowdhury, whose untiring efforts in chairing our negotiations will certainly not be forgotten.

Mr. President,

Throughout this review process, the European Union has had as its starting point and premise the concept of an integrated approach to population issues. In our view, this means both integration of population policy in the wider context of social policy, and, more specifically, integration of reproductive and sexual health services in primary health care.

From this viewpoint, it is easy to see that to implement the agreed goals of the ICPD Programme of Action, we need to act, not only in the reproductive and sexual health sector, but in the entire social sector, in education, in issues related to gender equality and the protection of minorities, and on the whole spectrum of democracy and good governance. Only through hard work in these crucial areas can we build the enabling environment necessary for the full realisation of the concept of reproductive and sexual health and reproductive rights.

I know it is no secret to anyone that the EU places great importance on the rights-based approach adopted at Cairo, and sees reproductive and sexual rights in close connection with other universally accepted human rights. As has been stated here, many times over, the EU's position is that all individuals should have the right to make free and responsible decisions concerning their sexuality, be they men or women, young or old.

Mr. President,

The interlinkages between demographic, social and economic development have been made clear in the context of all the global UN conferences of the 1990's. We cannot stress enough, however, the overwhelming weight of the evidence we have today of the profitability of investing in the social sector. Investment in health and other basic social services produces better socio-economic results than any other investment. Increased economic productivity helps to eradicate poverty and promotes social well-being which in turn helps to achieve comprehensive human security.

The question is of course, who is responsible for the provision of these services - and who is to pay for all this? Our common agreement continues to be that this responsibility lies with the national governments. Even if the organisation of these basic services varies from country to country, according to economic, social and other circumstances, the responsibility for guaranteeing their universal availability remains with the governments.

Having said this, we must by no means forget the crucial role international cooperation can play in this respect. International cooperation, be it multilateral or bilateral, becomes more and more important as the world grows smaller, through intensified communication and contacts between countries and people, but also through common problems that need to be tackled together, such as global environmental issues. We must all constantly remind ourselves to keep our focus and to make sure that our efforts in all these various fora are coherent and coordinated.

Talking about resources, it is of course clear that financial resources, domestic and international, are vital for achieving the goals set in Cairo and reaffirmed here today. Even more important, however, is the political will of which today's assembly is proof.

Also, in promoting the aims of the ICPD Programme of Action, one cannot overemphasise the vital role non-governmental organisations and the civil society as a whole can play. As we have learned, the best and most sustainable results in development are achieved when stakeholders are directly involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of all activities. Sustainable development can only be achieved on the basis of national priorities and programmes - keeping in mind the needs of local communities and focusing on the poorest and most vulnerable populations.

One particularly encouraging aspect of this review process has been the active involvement of NGOs and especially youth organisations in all stages of the process. Their commitment and hard work will be needed also in the implementation of the key future actions agreed to here. It is our view that civil society is a great means for achieving social change, but it is also an end in itself, since true democracy and good governance can only prosper in an environment where citizens take active part in decision-making at all levels.

As regards programmes for adolescents - one of the first priorities for the EU during this review - it is clear that young people themselves need to be directly involved. Most promising of all of the resources required today to improve life for young people, is the energy, intelligence and enthusiasm of young people themselves. At over one billion, today's is the biggest ever generation of youth between 15 and 24, and this age group is growing rapidly in many countries. The education, health and life choices offered to young people today determine the economic and social prospects of all countries in the years to come.

Experience has shown that when young people are provided with quality information, sexuality education, confidential counselling and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, they learn to make responsible choices. As a result, the incidence of unwanted pregnancies, abortions, HIV/AIDS and other STD's decreases significantly. Also, relatively new methods such as emergency contraception have been proven to be safe and important additions to the range of contraceptives.

Mr. President,

When we go home tonight, we take with us the affirmation of the fundamental principles underlying the Cairo agenda. We also take home some new key findings, and agreed key future actions. These include the renewed emphasis which we have given to the issues of adolescent reproductive and sexual health and rights, to maternal mortality, to HIV/AIDS, and to gender equality. We also take with us the firm knowledge that although the area we are dealing with is an exceptionally difficult and delicate one, it is possible, and vital, for all of us to work on it - together. With all its ups and downs, progress and set-backs, I believe we can still agree that this process has been a success in that it has taught all of us many important lessons. It has been a learning experience for all involved, for us government representatives as well as all the NGO and youth participants, and those at home in all our respective countries, including parliamentarians, politicians, civil society and others - who all have their eyes and ears on us, as we speak.

What we have to remember, is that this Special Session is not an isolated event. The Programme of Action rightly underlines that its implementation must be viewed as a part of an integrated follow-up effort to all major UN conferences and summits of the 1990's. We have all agreed to the principle of integrated conference follow-up, and it is the view of the EU that our focus should be on the implementation of the agreed actions on the country level. Governments, in collaboration with the civil society, should take a lead role in coordinating the implementation and evaluation of the key future actions agreed to today.

Mr. President,

Giving people the freedom and opportunities they need to grow, to take responsibility, to make informed choices and to fulfil their potential - that is what we see as the aim of the Cairo agenda and as our common task. Not numbers, but something much more important: the rights, well-being and development of each and every individual. Only on this basis can we hope to achieve sustainable human development.

Thank you, Mr. President.

