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STATEMENT

BY

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AND
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH, **SOCIAL WELFARE**
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AT

THE **21ST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**
GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT (ICPD+5)

AT

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL
UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

01 JULY 1999

Mr President

Your Excellencies

I would, first of all, like on behalf of His Excellency the President of the Republic, Alhaji Dr Yahya A J J Jammeh, the Government and people of The Gambia, to extend our profound gratitude to the Executive Secretary and staff of UNFPA for the invitation extended to us to participate **in this august gathering.**

My delegation notes with sincere appreciation the excellent preparations made to facilitate the successful holding of this Special Session and in particular, the distribution to delegations of useful reference documents to ensure an effective review and appraisal of the **ICPD** Programme of Action.

It is fitting, at this stage, Mr President, to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation during our deliberations, which I have no doubt will be rich and enlightening.

Mr President,

The holding of this special session, five years after Cairo, accords well with our commitment to the effective implementation of the **ICPD** Programme especially, given the present state of the world population.

The mandate of this special session, in accordance with General Assembly resolution **52/1 88**, to review and appraise the implementation of the **ICPD** Programme of Action after five years, is indeed on course.

The review and appraisal process will not only provide an opportunity to reassemble, once more, all the stakeholders in ICPD but also facilitate consideration of decisions and recommendations on a wide range of issues including the effectiveness of the 15 principles adopted at Cairo in order to ensure a more rational and effective implementation of the Programme of Action on a continuous basis.

It is gratifying to note that the two forerunners to this Special Session, the International Forum for the Operational Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the **ICPD** Programme of Action commonly referred to as the Hague Forum and the Thirty-Second Session of the Commission on Population and Development have successfully provided us with a comprehensive **action-**oriented set of recommendations on all the main issues affected by the implementation process.

In effect, the work of these two bodies in addition to the report and recommendations of the Preparatory Committee have not only simplified our own work during this session but also facilitated the reaching of a quick consensus on the way forward for the **ICPD** Programme of Action, especially in the new millennium.

Mr President,

Against this background of excellent preparatory work, however, it is a matter of concern if we recalled that at the time of the International Conference on population in 1994, the world population was at 'an all-time high in absolute number' and today 5 years later, it is still growing higher.

Population matters and their ramifications still constitute, on the whole, a

significant part of international concern and activities and one of the primary goals of sustainable development worldwide.

It is noteworthy that statistics have shown that each year the world population which now stands at almost 6 billion increases by 80 million and this trend will continue well into the next millenium. This population growth rate of between 1.4 percent and 1.7 percent, especially for developing countries, is **a cause of** concern in addition to the fact that during the last four decades, the world population had doubled.

In this regard, it is important to match words with action-oriented deeds; the programmes designed to meet these objectives should be re-inforced by adequate financial, technical, and material resources; and also the appropriate and expanded social services provided.

Developing countries including least developed countries will, in accordance with the requirements of the **ICPD** Programme of Action, require additional resources, including concessional and grant terms. The international community is expected to ensure full and consistent support, including financial and technical assistance, for the implementation process in the national, subregional and regional levels within the context of a coordinated approach on population policies and issues as well as population-related development matters.

Mr President

Patterned to this growth of the world population is the different age categories, primarily divided between the young and ageing.

Today, the ageing population is higher and has resulted, during this decade, in

fundamental changes in our livelihoods and social services requirements.

Secondly, these factors including constraints are accentuated by the growing bulge of our workforce composed of persons from the ages of 15 years to 20 years. In developing countries, this category is growing very fast and tends to serve as an attractive basis for more investment, greater labour productivity and rapid economic development, provided these opportunities exist.

It should however be pointed out that the growth and diversification in global population patterns have impacted negatively on the provision of adequate and sustainable social services, education and employment facilities in developing countries.

There is therefore an urgent necessity to strengthen and expand public and private institutions and the family unit to meet fully the needs and demands of young and elderly populations for health, employment, education and a productive social sector.

Mr President

The phenomenon of rapid population growth has been associated with high fertility rate, teenage pregnancies, lower mortality rate and longer life expectancy. Their effects on population growth in developing countries are more profound and therefore not effectively controlled.

The rate of population growth in the Gambia and other African countries testifies to the fact that Africa has the highest population growth rate in the world since 1950s increasing from 20.6 per cent between 1965 - 1970 to 3.4 per cent in 1992. At the current growth rate, the population of Africa is expected to reach

867 million in the year 2000 and 1.6 billion in 2025.

Mr President

The Gambia is, indeed, profoundly affected by rapid population growth with an unprecedented growth rate of 4.2 percent per annum. It is judged to be among the highest rates in the world and has continued to impose a great demographic burden on our national resources and development programme. An enduring threat is the fact that The Gambia's population has a potential to double every 16 years and this could seriously undermine our efforts in providing a better quality of life for our citizenry.

To meet the challenges posed by the rapid population growth, Government has put in place policies and programmes designed to reduce the growth rate as well as provide the necessary facilities and services to accommodate the increased population. These interventions are carried out in collaboration with non-governmental agencies and the programmes involved are **namely**, the National Population Policy and Programme, the Environment Action Programme and the Strategy for Poverty Alleviation. These programmes are intended to address the inter-related problems arising from the population sector, the environment, poverty and social development.

Another important dimension of this rapid population growth is the persistently high net migration being experienced by The Gambia. This is as a result of the growth and expansion of **destabilisation** influences in the West African Subregion and the series of political and security upheavals they have continued to engender. Government therefore plans to conduct a comprehensive migration study with a view to formulating a Migration policy that would help ease the congestion and problems caused by migration.

Mr President

I am pleased to state that The Gambia has been able to register some successes in the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action, inspite of existing constraints. The affected areas are notably, gender equity, equality and empowerment of women and youth, reproductive health, reduction in infant mortality from 167 per 1000 to 92 per 1000, total fertility rate from 6.40 percent to 6.04 percent, and an increase in life expectancy from 44 years to 55 years.

To consolidate these achievements our National Population Policy has been revised and an Action Plan prepared with the participation of all sectors of the society, including NGOs.

Mr President

The Gambia remains fully committed to the realisation of the programme and objectives of **ICPD** to the extent that 40 percent of the national recurrent budget is allocated to the development of the social sectors namely, Health, Population, Education and Poverty Alleviation.

In pursuant of our national population goals, Government has successfully entered into a productive partnership **with** the UNFPA, the World Bank and the International Planned Parenthood Federation through its local affiliate, the Gambia Family Planning Association. Non-Governmental Organisations are responsible for the implementation of 70 percent of the Advocacy **sub-**programmes on population and the World Bank contributes significantly to our efforts at mobilisation of resources.

I hasten to add, however, that there still exists funding gaps which should be filled if we are to adequately implement the ICPD plan of Action in conjunction with our national population programmes and activities. Filling these funding gaps and maintaining a sustained implementation process of the ICPD Programme of Action would require greater political and financial commitments from the international community. Developed countries that have attained high level of demographic development should be willing to make available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, the requisite technical know-how and other resources so as to speedily achieve the goals and objectives of the Programme of action.

Mr President

The dawn of the new millenium should herald a greater and sustained momentum in the implementation of the ICPD Plan of Action.

The attainment of the goals and objectives of ICPD cannot be fully realised in the absence of the commitment of the international community; in the absence of adequate and additional resources; in the absence of the availability of the appropriate technology, data and material resources from the developed to the developing countries; and in the absence of Full grassroots and NGOs participation.

Among the major demographic challenges confronting Governments and societies is rapid global population growth, which is likely to exceed six billion this year and with nearly 80 percent living in developing countries. The situation therefore calls for a concerted effort to achieve population stabilization and to consolidate the commendable achievements already recorded in our implemencacion of the ICPD Programme of Action.

Mr President

You will no doubt agree with me that posterity will judge us by how successful we have been in building lasting social infrastructure and services that would ensure a bright and beneficial future for the children of today and the generations of children yet unborn.

let us, therefore, resolve to pursue vigorously the ICPD goals by implementing all the recommendations and other requirements that will emerge from this Special Session to secure a safe and progressive future for humankind.

Thank you.