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STATEMENT
BY
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AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF GHANA
AT
THE 21ST SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE U. N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FOR THE OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION
OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

NEW YORK 30TH JUNE, 1999

Mr. President,

It is my honour and privilege to make this statement on behalf of the Republic of Ghana.

Mr. President,

Even before the Cairo Conference in 1994, Ghana had revised her population policy and had anticipated in many material respects, the goals, principles and strategies recommended by the ICPD.

The end product, while emphasizing issues relating to adolescents, the youth, women, the aged and persons with disabilities, also incorporated such emerging issues as the environment and the threat of HIV/AIDS. It represents, in effect, the collective determination and commitment of the people to the principle that a well-managed population is a fundamental requirement for sustainable development.

Mr. President,

The post-ICPD era has been for Ghana one of continuity in the sense that relevant areas of past policies have been reinforced while other areas have witnessed changes meant to address new concepts and issues. In sum, the ICPD has provided welcome opportunities for Ghana to:

- * strengthen mechanisms and strategies;
- retain and refine relevant policies already in operation; and
- * strengthen partnerships and enhance collaboration with key stakeholders especially donors, NGOs, the private sector and civil society.

The ultimate objective is a people-centred development policy, which will create opportunities for all Ghanaians to realize their full potential through the exercise of meaningful choices. The democratic dispensation which the Government has nurtured will certainly ensure this positive outcome.

Mr. President,

The general policy environment within which we are implementing our Revised Population Policy and the ICPD Programme of Action has been considerably enhanced by the Government's blue-print for socio-economic transformation titled VISION 2020: THE FIRST STEP. This document sets out the medium and long-term goals, targets and strategies required to transform Ghana into a middle-income economy by 2020.

Within the context of Vision 2020 and in anticipation of the possible emergence of mega-cities in the 21st century, we are vigorously addressing the phenomenon of urban growth through the enhancement of integrated rural development. Indeed, decentralization of both political power and responsibility for planning as a means of promoting community involvement in all aspects of the development process is now a critical strategy to ensure that population concerns are fully integrated into district and sub-district level planning as well as programme activities.

The objective is to take full account of population variables in planning and policy-making at the district level, where it matters most. It is in this respect that my Government attaches the utmost importance to the Population and Housing Census to be conducted early next year, the first in 16 years. Indeed, plans are almost complete for a trial census this month. The census, when completed, will provide a more reliable data base for planning, monitoring and evaluation of population and related matters.

A vastly-improved legal and policy environment has ensured that the necessary laws have been passed and other consequential measures taken to promote gender equality, equity and the empowerment of women. Female genital mutilation (FGM) has been outlawed. The practice of confining girls in shrines as a punishment for 'crimes' committed by members of their families has been criminalized.

In active collaboration with the Parliamentary Caucus on Population and Development, the search continues for such other areas of law and policy as are in need of reform to make them consistent not only with our Constitution but also international instruments such as the ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Indeed, various coalitions established by the National Population Council recently linked up with the Caucus in spearheading and mobilizing the necessary support for the enactment of a comprehensive Children's Bill, one of whose provisions fixes the minimum age for marriage at 18.

An Affirmative Action Policy recently approved by Cabinet, among other things, commits the Government to ensuring 40 percent women's political representation and appointment to various bodies.

In order to achieve the desired change in behaviour, attitudes and practice, we will continue to engage in constant advocacy and consensus-building by fostering and maintaining strategic partnerships and functional linkages with NGOs, youth and women's groups and community and opinion leaders, especially traditional rulers and religious leaders as well as the private sector.

Appropriate policy guidelines have been developed to guide programme implementors in the field of reproductive and sexual health as well as reproductive rights.

We have integrated reproductive health into our primary health care and referral systems. Besides, a full range of basic reproductive health services is provided at these levels.

Mr. President,

We fully recognize the right of individuals and couples to plan their families. Consequently, strategies, including information and education, have been designed to generate demand for the fullest possible range of family planning methods. A campaign on the use of long-term family planning methods is being actively waged.

The identified **high-risk HIV/AIDS** age group of 20 - 35 years has been targeted for special attention. Measures adopted include **counselling**, the establishment of Associations of People Living with HIV/AIDS and production and circulation of STD guidelines. The national response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic is being comprehensively reviewed and a draft National Policy on HIV/AIDS is in course of preparation.

Mr. President,

A comprehensive draft **Policy on Ageing** is also being prepared. In the meantime, a programme of free medical care for elderly persons as well as a policy of their exemption from payment of basic rates has been introduced.

Ghana is determined to continue to implement the ICPD Programme of Action to the letter and in this regard we are committing as much resources as we can to the social sector. Like many other developing countries, however, we face serious resource constraints as a result of policies we are having to implement to ensure macro-economic stability and, more significantly, the unsustainable external debt repayment terms and diminished economic potential arising from problems of market access.

The impact of these is to further constrain our ability to deal with problems encountered in the implementation of the Programme of Action. These problems include shortage of trained manpower, inequitable distribution of health service staff, inadequate access to services, especially in rural areas, and negative socio-cultural beliefs and practices.

Mr. President,

Permit me to emphasize that without significant improvement in the external environment for trade and debt servicing and repayments, our efforts will not lead to the agreed targets in the Programme of Action, even if our partners did more to meet the agreed ODA targets and their commitments in the Programme of Action.

As a nation, we are committed to undertaking these activities because it serves the best interests of our people and we would implement them even without the Programme of Action. The Programme of Action, however, offers a partnership, shared interests and opportunities, which enhance our capacity to achieve our goal of sustainable human development within our limited resources.

It is our hope therefore that the entire review process will lead to a renewal of commitments made in Cairo and where circumstances dictate, as indeed is the case in a number of areas, to even greater commitment.

Mr. President,

I thank you for your attention.