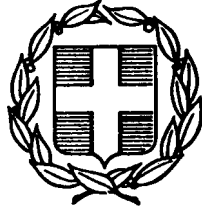


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PERMANENT MISSION OF GREECE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

by

**H.E. Mr. Theodoros Kotsonis,
Vice-Minister of Health and Welfare**

**Head of the Greek Delegation
to the twenty-first special session
of the General Assembly**

to review and appraise the implementation
of the Programme of Action of the International
Conference **on Population and Development**

New York, 30 June – 2 July

**Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Greece as a Member State of European Union, fully subscribes to the E.U. statement delivered by the German Vice-Minister of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and is looking forward towards the implementation of the Cairo agenda. We firmly believe that this Special Session of the General Assembly should give a new impetus on the wider issues of population and development in the threshold of the 21st century.

My country shares the concerns along with other European countries on the issues of ageing population, low fertility rate, increased urbanization and international migration. The situation is further complicated by a recent influx of immigrants from countries at our fringe.

At a time like this, it becomes even more important to foster social cohesion and to design policies that prevent any social problems, such as social exclusion, poverty and all types of inequality. What becomes a daily worry is to know how existing policies, new programs and any revisions thereof, take into account concrete realities and alleviate problems.

The fluidity of our environment, the knowledge we thought as given, the challenges we have yet to understand and the expectations we feel around us, often make us feel puzzled. The gloomy picture changes when we know that even the hardest situations have been overcome and societies have always survived. It is these times of historically overcome hardship that one can revert for lessons and for ideas. Such lessons concern those institutions, which have endured in the past, and preserved at our times too. Family is one of them and probably the most important. In our policies we always try to see the implications for families; in case we do not directly aim to strengthen them, we make sure not to weaken them.

Additionally, our policies focus on education and employment, which are the longest enduring institutions in terms of integration and cohesion. Making sure that all children and youngsters enjoy primary education is a meaningful aim to direct social policy for the younger ages. Work opportunity is intricately linked with education and becomes a vehicle of survival and personal dignity for all ages. Along with other countries we seem to converge on those two aims and in fact we have incorporated the educational and employment dimensions in our social policies.

Regarding migration, it is a fact that the best approach to confront its implications is the consistent promotion of peace, stability and development, in all countries concerned.

In our region, facing nowadays the consequences of a dire crisis, it is important to promote rapid restructuring, recovering and development in favor of all populations of the countries affected. In this context, Greece offered 7 million USD in humanitarian aid, in cash and in kind, a large portion of which was channeled through Non Governmental Organizations.

Mr. Chairman,

Although time is very limited to describe all the actions undertaken by the Greek Government within the population and development framework, as well as all the actions we plan and urge on, I would like to mention a few:

- We initiated, in the framework of the national health and primary health, more practices aiming at improving reproductive and sexual health and rights. Highlighted priorities include_ family planning, maternal health, HIV/AIDS/STD prevention and management, adolescent and reproductive health, and sexual education and counseling.**
- We initiated, due to the high mobility of populations in our region, a plan of co-operation with South-Eastern European Countries, in order to create a shield against AIDS.**
- We reaffirmed the planning of public welfare services and we redefined its provision to four categories including: family-childhood-youth; the elderly; disabled persons; social vulnerable groups. We also determined the framework for cooperation with NGOs.**

- Aiming at the integrated protection of the family unit, we increased family benefits.
- Based on the National Action Plan for Employment, we continue creating new labor positions to combat unemployment.
- We provided initiatives to the private sector, for the enhancement of the economic and regional development.
- We are creating the conditions for the empowerment of women in the political, economic and cultural fields by redefining gender roles.
- We continue to provide free medical, pharmaceutical and hospital care through the National Health System and free access to the Public Educational System to all immigrants in need, refugees and asylum seekers. In addition, we established the conditions and procedures for the stay and employment of economic immigrants that reside in the country legally.

However, for us, there is a range of issues that are open for discussion and address local, regional and national problems, which in many cases have global origins. We are aware that the positive aspects of globalization could be at risk if we do not promote concerted international action,' good regional cooperation and the will to think beyond our borders.

Greece firmly believes that this international outlook is the right direction for our society to invest in for the future. Our hitherto values and traditions in human and social rights entitles us to do so.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are living in a changing world and mankind faces many challenges. It is in our hands to work out **problems and** overcome obstacles, based on lessons learned, towards a brave and **more sensitive society.**

Thank you