



As WRITTEN

# Guatemala

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Twenty-first special session of the General Assembly  
on the 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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STATEMENT BY ROSSANA DE HEGEL, UNDER-SECRETARY  
FOR EXTERNAL COOPERATION, SECRETARIAT FOR PLANNING  
AND PROGRAMMING, PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
GUATEMALA, AT THE TWENTY-FIRST SPECIAL SESSION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE PROGRAMME OF  
ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT\*

(1 July 1999)

Mr. President:

Five years ago the Government of Guatemala endorsed a number of guidelines derived from the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo.

Despite our identification with the broad principles and objectives laid down in that Programme of Action, which we reiterate today, we have entered certain reservations to that Programme, in keeping with our Constitution, which obligates the State to guarantee and protect human life from the moment of its conception.

This is a basic principle underlying our population policy. It justifies our support for the majority of the sectoral objectives laid down in the Programme of Action, particularly in the areas of health, education, and the role of the family (the latter being understood as the union between man and woman, which is the origin of life).

On these bases we have made progress in the fulfillment of the guidelines emanating from the Programme of Action. Aware as we are of the interrelation between population, poverty, patterns of production as well as consumption, and the environment, we have undertaken to foster sustained human development and a clear agenda for democracy. This national commitment was embodied in the Peace Agreements concluded on 29 December 1996. A wide overlap exists between the substance of the obligations laid down in these Agreements and those laid down in the Cairo Programme of Action, so that advances in respect of the former automatically translate into advances in terms of the latter.

The Peace Agreements, which are important in themselves and have a far wider significance, have had a deep and immediate effect inasmuch as they have normalized the living conditions of over one million internally displaced persons and resulted in the return of almost 42,500 refugees who had remained in Mexico during most of the duration of the armed conflict. The Special Commission established for the Repatriation of Refugees (CEAR) officially wound up its work on the 24th of last month, thus closing a painful chapter in our history that had altered population dynamics in the country.

Allow me at this point, Mr. President, to open a parenthesis in order to reiterate the  
\* Unofficial translation.

gratitude of the people and Government of Guatemala for the support we have received from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I also wish to express once again our special appreciation for the fraternal gesture of solidarity by the people and Government of Mexico, and also say how grateful we are for the cooperation extended by other friendly countries that have so generously provided support.

Returning now to the question of the fulfillment of the Programme of Action I would like to emphasize that Guatemala finds itself in the initial phase of its demographic transition: the rate of population increase during the last intercensal period was 2.6%. Fertility rates show a downward trend, but mortality rates are dropping faster. Although the proportion of the population living in rural areas has diminished --from 67.3% to 65% over the last decade-- it remains high, while pressures and population movements towards the agricultural frontier persist,

Other pertinent indicators have also undergone significant changes. From 1990 to 1999 life expectancy at birth rose from 62.6 to 67.2 years. From 1991 to 1997 the maternal mortality rate dropped from 240 to 95.1 per 100,000 births. From 1995 to 1997 the infant mortality rate dropped from 51.0 to 37.8 out of each 1,000 children born alive. It is in the rural area that these indicators have improved the most.

A decrease in chronic and acute malnutrition, a gradual increase in the use of contraceptives and natural methods for preventing pregnancy, as well as a doubling of the number of women of child-bearing age having access to secondary education, are some of the most notable improvements recorded in the latest Mother and Child Health Survey, carried out last year. In this regard it is worth pointing out that the illiteracy rate has been reduced from 37.5% in 1995 to 32.6% in 1998 and that primary school enrolment has reached 92%.

From these figures it is not only clear that coverage has expanded. They also show that the rate at which coverage expands is rising. This, in turn, will, in the short and medium term, have an effect on the magnitude of demographic indicators, particularly in the fertility rate, the spacing and the minimum age at which conceptions occur. These indicators are already reacting, albeit at a moderate pace.

A fundamental factor in public policy that seeks to modify population dynamics in Guatemala in the long term has been a sustained increase in social expenditure. According to official estimates, between 1995 and 1998 social expenditure represented, on average, 40.2% of public expenditure and 4.1% of the GNP. Last year social expenditure reached 5.8% of the GNP.

This expenditure has focused not only on social sectors, but also on priority care for vulnerable groups: families, women, ethnic groups, children and young people. The fundamental strategy pursued has been to involve the communities themselves in the provision of health and education services, which has contributed to an expansion of

coverage and the sustainability of services.

In conformity with the provisions of the Peace Agreements, the Beijing Summit, and the policy for the promotion of Women, as well as the National Plan for the Promotion of Equitable Conditions, the Government is carrying out strategic actions to enhance recognition of the role of women and access, on a footing of equality, to opportunities that can lead to an improvement of their status and the quality of their life. The National Women's Forum was established, with the participation of women from diverse sectors of civil society and delegates of the Government of Guatemala. Their mission is to oversee the compliance regarding women in development contained in the framework of the Peace Accords. The Law to Further the Dignity and Integral Promotion of Women, as well as the Law to Prevent and Eradicate inter-Family Violence were enacted. The Educational Reform was initiated. All these actions entail substantive elements that can contribute significantly to the permanent elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against women. I might add that our commitments in these areas are promoted and supervised by the National Forum for Women.

Similarly, the National Plan for the Reduction of Maternal Mortality, the programme known as "Woman, Health and Development", the National Plan for Adolescents and the Health Code adopted in November 1997 initiate actions aimed at improving the health of women and children. The approach is a holistic and preventive; it aims to ameliorate the physical and social environment at the level of the family in the various stages of its growth and development.

Mr. President:

Our Constitution requires the State to guarantee the protection of the family on the social, economic and legal planes, as well as to promote its organization on the legal basis of marriage, equality of rights between spouses, responsible paternity and the right of all persons to decide freely on the number and spacing of their children.

Our Government is thus deeply respectful of the moral, cultural and ethical values of the persons and institutions that make up our society. Accordingly, the basic tenet of our population policy is that any activity in this area must be in conformity with the laws in force and be based on the consent of the persons concerned. Just as in our multiethnic and multicultural society we respect the beliefs of all Guatemalans, we do not hamper the work of those who, from a different perspective and in compliance with our legal system, carry out activities seeking to modify population dynamics.

Such is the spirit of dialogue and harmonious accord that animates the Peace Agreements. Such is the conviction underlying the actions of our Government in the area of population policy.

Thank you very much.