

# ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Permanent Mission to the United Nations

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## P R E S S                      S E C T I O N

Statement by  
H.E. Dr. Mohammad Farhadi  
Minister of Health and Medical Education  
of the Islamic Republic of Iran  
at the

Twenty-First Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to the  
Overall -Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme  
of Action of the International Conference on Population and  
Development  
30 June 1999, New York

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the very outset, let me express, on my own behalf as well as on behalf of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, our most sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, and the entire Bureau and wish you all utmost success. Your political acumen, diplomatic experience and wisdom will certainly steer this important gathering towards an excellent outcome.

The Cairo International Conference on Population and Development can certainly be considered an outstanding event for the international community and the United Nations in recent years. Its outcome, the Programme of Action in particular, constituted an historic turning point and established the organic link between population and development. The extent and level of participation by states as well as other stakeholders was clearly indicative of the degree of interest and sensitivity on their part to the wide range of issues involved. Five years later, as is quite evident from the issues under discussion and the intensity of debates on matters in dispute, the international community is facing formidable **challenges** in this field and still grappling with the question of how

to better implement the commitments undertaken in Cairo.

Let me be very clear on this point. The very first and foremost objective of the review process of the Cairo Conference, and of course, this Special Session, is to remain **faithful** to the letter and spirit of the Cairo Programme of Action. We are here to assess the state of the implementation of that important document, take stock of achievements at both national and international levels thus far, identify the obstacles, and also to explore new initiatives and measures to further promote its implementation. Hence, it is absolutely imperative for us all, developed and developing, to utilize the current propitious opportunity for advancing north-south dialogue and partnership which was the hallmark of the Cairo Conference. The limited precious time of the Special Session can hardly be lavished on unnecessary and yet avoidable controversy on highly contested new ideas and concepts, which, in any event, are simply unrelated and unhelpful to the question of implementation of what we agreed back in 1994.

It should be underlined that the question of population is not a numbers game. Rather, it is about human beings and it deals with such important and sensitive concepts and issues as family, marriage, reproduction and sexuality which play a central role in the life of all societies. At the conceptual level, because these concepts involve long-established universal **fundamental** ethical principles and values, their treatment necessarily requires commensurate consideration and cannot be subjected to a “laissez faire, laissez passer” mentality and approach. At a more practical level, however, population policies and programmes constitute an essential element in the overall human development strategy of each and every society and whose successful planning and implementation depends, in the final analysis, on the overall progress in the economic growth and development of each individual society. Within this context, poverty is to be considered as the most formidable enemy of human development policies in general, and population policies in particular. Needless to say, then, that poverty eradication would help to create the necessary social and economic milieu in which access to basic services, including health services and family planning, could be improved and provided on a mass scale. But, as we all know, enabling environment for the formulation and implementation of sound population policies cannot be merely limited to the national level. Creation and sustenance of an overall enabling environment at the international level is equally imperative, particularly in these times of unfettered **globalization** and its drastic economic, socio-cultural and even political impact on all societies, in particular developing countries.

Mr. President,

Existing data on total global domestic resource flows for population indicates that developing countries have made substantial progress in achieving the goals set in Cairo. This is clearly indicative of their practical commitment to what they undertook in ICPD five years ago. That, however, cannot be said about the international assistance. A whole lot more needs to be done in this respect. And in fact, an important part of our success in the review process is directly related to and contingent upon success in resource mobilization and international cooperation. Another area of progress in the developing countries concerns the formulation of new national population policies or programmes, or revising of the existing policies and programmes. We believe this is the right approach and should

be further encouraged and facilitated by the review process. Formulation and implementation of national population policies is bound to make a real difference on the ground. The international community can indeed make a valuable contribution in this area by provision of necessary resources, both financial and technical, and through a more concerted efforts in the field of capacity building in the developing countries. Rapid and continuing growth in the number of young people on a global scale, particularly in the developing countries, is one of the major challenges we all face now, and more so in the future, which needs to be addressed in earnest and with priority. The review process should undertake to adopt requisite initiatives and measures towards creating a safe and supportive environment for the youth and the adolescents, which calls for the active involvement and participation of all stakeholders.

Mr. President

Let me now turn to the national scene. Cognizant of the importance of the questions of population and development, the Islamic Republic of Iran actively participated in the Cairo Conference and made its contribution to the **final** outcome. Moreover, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has since vigorously pursued the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action.

Relying on the three bases of Islam, nationality and republicanism, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran while respecting the rights and dignity of the individual, considers family as the basic unit of society and social life, in which the respective rights, functions and roles of both parents and children are **defined**. The formulation and implementation of population policy, including family planning, in the Islamic Republic of Iran has been based on such a definition and with due regard for the socio-cultural characteristics as well as development needs and requirements of the society. At a more practical level, our strategy for family planning, with the objective of birth control, was based on the simultaneous promulgation of appropriate legislation, promotion of public awareness and provision of necessary services, particularly directed to young couples. These policies and measures, much reinforced by the high political commitment of the Government, led to a sharp decrease in the crude birth rate from 38 to 17.7 per thousand between 1984 and 1997. During the same period, the annual natural rate of growth of population dropped from 3.2 to 1.4 percent.

Another important pillar of the said strategy concerns the establishment of a nation-wide primary health care system, based on the experiences in other countries of delivery system, which now covers 95% of the country's population. This system, integrated with medical education, delivers all the elements of primary health care, including reproductive health as part of family health in an integrated manner. Reduction in infant and child mortality rates from 104 and 173 in early 1980s to 26 and 33 per thousand live births in 1996 respectively is one of the major achievements of the said system. During the same period, maternal mortality rate also dropped from 237 to 37.5 per 100,000 live births. Here, I let me add that, despite limitations of various sorts, the health care system and reproductive services have **also** been extended to the more than two million refugees in the country, still the largest refugee load in one country in the world.

Empowerment of women can be considered another important aspect of the overall policies

of the Iranian Government over the past decade and a half, which has contributed significantly to the success of population policy and family planning. During this period extensive as well as intensive efforts have been made by the Government to promote the status of women, inter alia, through promulgation of legislation in various individual and family-related areas, promotion of education at all levels, and facilitation of women's participation in all areas of social life. Establishment of more than 240 women's commissions across the country, particularly in the rural areas, has also helped in this direction. Women's active involvement in the health sector, including in the reproductive **health**-related activities, represents an important aspect of their active and growing role on a national scale. While significant strides have been made in this area, a lot more still needs to be done. The Government's stated and emphatic orientation towards the promotion and strengthening of the role and status of civil society in the national life also aims at further buttressing women's empowerment.

Mr. President,

In closing, I would like to underscore two other points of a general nature. The first point relates to our national experience in population policy and **family** planning. Formulation, adoption and implementation of population- and family-related policies in Iran whose success has been recognized at the international level and awarded this year by the United Nations Population Award Committee, represents a vivid confirmation of compatibility between religion and the religious outlook and population policies and family planning. We believe our experience carries important theoretical as well as practical lessons for other developing societies, particularly those with similar socio-cultural characteristics. On this we are willing and prepared to share our experience with other interested countries, including through UNFPA, with which we have excellent relations and which has helped us in the implementation of our population policies. The second and in fact, the last point, concerns the imperative of respect for national cultures and particular religious values of different societies in the process of the implementation of the of the Cairo Programme of Action and the future implementation of the outcome of the review process. Such an approach and conduct in practice by all would certainly provide a solid basis for sustainable genuine international cooperation.

In my very last words, Mr. President, allow me to assure you and this august body of our **full** cooperation towards making our collective enterprise here a total success.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.