

As written

January 8 - 12, 1999, the Hague

Address of Mr. Vladimir-s Makarovs

Minister of Welfare

Republic of Latvia



Mister Chairman,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(On behalf of the Republic of Latvia I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, with your election to this high office and I would like to ensure you about our support and cooperation. The Delegation is convinced that under your chairmanship the conference will become a significant event in the history of international cooperation.)

On behalf of the Republic of Latvia I would like to express our gratitude for the support of the UNFPA and the opportunity provided to the delegation of our country to take part in this important conference.

I would express our gratitude and appreciation to all member states, international organizations as well as private organizations and individuals who have assisted and have given a considerable contribution in resolving issues related to the development of the population.

I would like also to thank the management and the staff of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Office for their work and great support to the promotion of a sustainable development of the population.

More than 180 countries which have convened here today have different problems but one aim - to evaluate the work we have done, what problems

we have encountered, to consider our future actions in implementing the Action Plan of the Cairo Conference.

In this respect at the end of 1998 the Welfare Ministry of Latvia together with the United Nations Development Program and the non-governmental organization - the Association of Family Planning and Sexual Health - organized a conference - The population of Latvia and its development after the Cairo Conference. It was the first time when a conference representing different social groups was organized to discuss problems related to the population and its development. One of the main objectives of the Conference was to identify the dynamics of development in the period from 1994 till 1998, to evaluate the present situation, to review measures taken to improve the situation in line with the Action Program of the Cairo Conference. During the Conference the present situation was discussed and recommendations developed for work in such areas as economy, demography, reproductive health and rights, gender equality, education. For Latvia this conference was important also because, in contrast to many countries of the world which have the problem of overpopulation, Latvia faces the problem of depopulation, related to the decrease in the number of population caused by the high mortality rate, the low birth rate and the negative migration balance. Latvia like other countries of the world has to address the problem of the aging of the population.

The existence of a demographic crisis in Latvia can be proved by quantitative indicators as well as qualitative indicators. At present there is evidence of the following positive trends in the reproductive process of the population:

- 1) over the recent years the rate of the decrease in the number of the population has slowed down,. After the restoration of the independence of Latvia the decrease was affected by the high negative migration balance. By 1997 this figure has decreased almost by 7 times. The lowest natural growth was recorded in 1994 but by 1997 this figure has also gradually improved.
- 2) over the recent years the mortality rate, including infant mortality rate, has started to decline;
- 3) the number of artificial abortions has decreased;
- 4) there has been a significant increase in the projected life-span for men and for women.

The positive trends have been achieved due to the national policy in ensuring economic stability which has resulted in a growing trust of the population in the state and in a decline of migration, the national policy in reforming the public health care system, the national policy in reducing the mortality rate of mothers and infants.

However, the demographic picture of Latvia will not be complete if nothing is said also about the negative changes and trends:

- 1) the number of the newly -born children continues to decline;
- 2) the number of women at the fertile age is decreasing;
- 3) the total fertility rate also continues to decline;
- 4) the number of divorces has grown;
- 5) the aging of the population in Latvia continues.

Although Latvia has gained great success in the transition to market economy, a demographic and law-based state, the above trends in the development of the demographic situation confirms the fact that the promotion of the development of the population needs lots of extensive work, resources and long-term investments. In order to ensure an effective use of opportunities gained with the national independence and democratic changes in developing the population, an urgent task is to strengthen cooperation between the individual and the state, to develop agencies characteristic for a civic society, to increase the activity of non-governmental organizations, to eliminate poverty. At present a strategy for the Elimination of Poverty is being developed in Latvia which, when implemented, will contribute considerably in the improvement of the quality of life for the population. It must be noted that this project is implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Development Program and Non - government organizations will also be involved in the activities which will improve the partnership between these state and non-governmental organizations in developing a policy for the development of society.

It is important to understand that in improving the demographic situation as well as ensuring a sustainable development for the population it is important that all the basic needs of people are satisfied - life and safety, clean water and wholesome food, good health, education, labor and decent living standards. Only when these basic needs are accessible the individual can exercise his/her other rights - to develop a civic society, to take part in the political life, to develop one's individuality. It is also important to recognize the necessity for public solidarity when relations among representatives of

various groups are based on the principles of equality and coordination of interests.

At the end of my address I would like to express the conviction that work at this conference will be creative and successful, that special attention will be paid to those problems which have emerged in the developing countries where the problems of the development of the demographic situation and the development of the population are very similar.

Thank you for attention.