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STATEMENT BY

**H.E. AMBASSADOR GEORGE SALIBA
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF MALTA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**AT THE TWENTY-FIRST SPECIAL SESSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE REVIEW AND APPRAISAL
OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

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**PERMANENT MISSION OF MALTA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Government of Malta attaches special importance to the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action, which it considers an important step forward in the achievement of a holistic social and economic development, which centres on the respect for every individual's needs.

Five years **after** the adoption of the Cairo Programme of Action, considerable progress has been made in its implementation. However, more needs to be done to address the well being of human beings and to achieve sustainable development. In this respect the Government of Malta believes that the outcome of this Conference should not be dealt with in isolation. Cross-cutting issues and commitments, such as those emanating from UNCED and in particular Agenda 21, are to be addressed at the national and international level in a comprehensive manner by taking into account social needs, economic growth and environmental concerns.

It is our position that the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action, should be addressed by every sovereign State in accordance with its national laws, development needs, and concerns, and the ethical, religious and cultural background of its people.

Mr. President

There is no doubt that the increase in the world's population in the last decades and its concentration in urban areas, has led to unprecedented pressures on and the deterioration of the physical environment.

This issue, of the relationship between environmental capacity and population growth needs to be addressed urgently and in an integrated manner. A way out is by adopting an integrated management strategy where all factors are taken into account when formulating plans and policies for sustainable development.

In this regard, the Maltese Parliament has adopted, back in the early 90s, a number of national legislative acts, including the Development Planning Act and the Environment Protection Act, to tackle in an integrated manner the issues of population, economic growth and the environment in the Maltese Islands, which incidentally has one of the highest population densities on the planet. In line with these acts, a Planning Authority and the Environment Protection Department have been established to promote physical planning, and monitor, protect and promote the state of the environment.

Mr. President

One of the major concerns in population trends is the fact that unprecedented longevity is now affecting the populations of most developing countries and that this phenomenon is expected to accelerate rapidly during the next two decades. In this respect, major challenges face not only

developing countries but also even developed ones, and demographic ageing will manifest itself in growths in the cost of old age pensions, medical care and assistance in daily needs.

Within this context, and understanding the emphasis of the fundamental objectives of the Programme of Action, Malta held in May 1998 the 7th Conference of European Ministers responsible for social security with the theme of Social Security and its Transition into the 21st Century. This Conference dealt with developments in the role and responsibility of systems and actors in the social field, both public and private and, in particular the coordinating role of the State with regard to the various actors in the field and the implementation of social security policy.

Although, due to high fertility rates, the actual percentage of elderly persons in the population is only about 6%, their numbers in most developing countries will more than double in the next twenty years

The Government of Malta believes that while research and the collection of data in developing countries is vital, an even more important requirement is training. This training should cover both the areas of demography as well as social gerontology.

The UN International Institute on Ageing hosted by Malta has for the past eleven years, with the assistance of UNFPA and UNDP, and with a major contribution from the Government of Malta, provided such training to personnel from developing countries from all over the world.

The Institute is now moving into the second phase of its training strategy by organizing on-site regional and national courses. In fact, the Institute has no less than twelve courses scheduled for this year. In view of the greatly increased demands for training **from** developing countries in this area, the Government of Malta calls for further contributions to this unique international effort.

Mr. President

Although, the percentage of people in Malta living below the acceptable national standard of living is about 1%, the Government continues to give special importance to social services, and within the constraints of a small island economy, social welfare programmes now provide an adequate safety net even for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

In fact, the implementation of social and economic measures has always been the backbone of Maltese Governments policies. Suffice to state that more than half of the Government's expenditure is directed towards health, education and social welfare. Free medical care and education, elaborate social security and welfare provisions, and economic development have resulted in a more than satisfactory population development which enables every individual to enjoy a fruitful and satisfactory life.

Mr. President

Education in Malta, spanning from pre-grade to University is freely available to all. Moreover, a stipends system for tertiary education is in place to provide for the needs of students and promote the continuation of their studies. Here, one needs also to underscore that female students roughly