



**MAURITIUS**

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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
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**Twenty-first Special Session of  
The General Assembly of the United Nations  
For the Overall Review and Appraisal of  
The Implementation of the Programme of Action of the  
International Conference on Population and Development**

**Statement by**

**AMBASSADOR ANUND P. NEEWOOR**

**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
MAURITIUS TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**New York, July 01 1999**

Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you on your election to preside over the Special Session of the General Assembly to review the progress made since the Cairo Conference on Population and Development. This review should enable us to set out strategies for action to be pursued by the international community in the years ahead.

Population is indeed not an issue that is to be examined in isolation. A country's demography has a fundamental correlation to its economic, social, environmental and other. As a small island developing country, Mauritius faces many inherent vulnerabilities. Population consequently is a factor to be reckoned with if we are to achieve sustainable development.

Indeed, for Mauritius, population management has since a very long time been one of the core issues of our development strategy.

At the time of our independence in 1968, we were essentially an agricultural economy on a small over-populated island. Unemployment and a general lack of social amenities were striking features of the country. Population aspects and trends were consequently given due consideration in the elaboration of national policies in the field of education, health, housing and infrastructure. Investments were made in those sectors as a matter of priority to accommodate the needs of our young and growing population.

The limitation of resources inherent to a small island nation called for programmes to address the rate of population growth. Yet, consistent with our democratic principles, all policies concerning population management and measures for their implementation have always been in conformity with the fundamental rights and freedom of our citizens. **Development should, after all, be about the well being of the population.** The Government and the NGOs, which are at the forefront of the implementation of population programmes, have relied exclusively on education and information so that participants may take informed and free-willed decisions. **Coercion has never been resorted to.**

**The Total Fertility Rate in Mauritius has declined from 6 in 1962 to about 2 at present.** The total population which was 682,000 in 1962 stands at 1.2 million at present contrary to the 2.7 million which was projected in the early sixties when a growth rate of 3% per annum was anticipated.

**Mr. President,**

Mauritius feels very at ease with the proposals of the Programme of Action adopted by the ICPD in 1994. Indeed, some of the proposed goals for achievement within the next twenty years were already being pursued since the years following our independence in 1968. They are:

- 1. Reduction of Infant, Child and Maternal Mortality**
- 2. Education especially for girls**
- 3. Provision of universal access to reproductive health services, including Family Planning.**

The **Programme** of Action has other recommendations which are still very relevant to Mauritius. They are for example:

- 1. The roles, rights, composition and structure of the family**
- 2. Employment of Women and gender equity**
- 3. HIV/AIDS**
- 4. Care of the elderly**

Mauritius is seeking to apply these recommendations through various programmes. Concerning the health aspect, to ensure full community participation, in accordance with the WHO declaration of “Health for All by the Year **2000**”, a Primary Health Care Agenda has been adopted. Efforts are made to ensure access to adequate health care to all citizens through a network of health facilities throughout the country. A national screening programme has also started for the early detection of Cervical and Breast Cancer. We expect Maternal Mortality Rate to decline from 0.3 to 0.2, prenatal mortality rates from 24.7 to 20 and the Infant Mortality Rate **from** 19.6 to around 15.0 by the Year 2000.

Mauritius needs to sustain past achievements and respond to new challenges. Keeping our Cross Reproduction Rate at replacement level for the next 20 years will inevitably lead to a change in the age structure of our population. We shall be faced with an ageing population and its serious socio-economic implications. More pressure will be added on the public health system, which is an **essentially free** service, as the demand for geriatric services increases.

Our social security, which provides inter *alia* a non-contributory old age pension to all citizens above the age of sixty, is already feeling the increasing pressure.

**This brings us, Mr. President, to the very important issue of funding.**

Commitments were made by the international community to provide funds for the implementation of the Programme of Action. Urgent financial assistance is needed for developing countries to continue their efforts in the field of population and development. It would not be realistic to assume that the targets set by the Programme of Action can be met by all developing countries without external assistance, which unfortunately, is declining. Marginalisation faced by many countries particularly those with smaller economies further compound the situation.

At the African regional level it is a matter of primary importance that the international community reacts urgently and adequately to the scourge of HIV/AIDS which has devastating impact on population and development. Countries which have been spared up to now need also to be assisted to run preventive programmes. We call on the WHO, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, and all our development partners to increase their efforts to address this problem which, for many countries in Africa, may now be the primary obstacle to development.

Mr. President, I wish to pay a special tribute to the efforts and achievements of the UNFPA and its Executive Director, **Dr. Nafis Sadik**, since the Cairo conference. We hope that this review process of the International Conference on Population and Development will result in renewed commitment to our shared objective of sustainable human development.