



**Permanent Mission of the Republic of Namibia
to the United Nations
135 East 36 Street, New York, N.Y. 10016
Tel: (212) 685-2003 • Fax (212) 685-1561**

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STATEMENT BY

HONOURABLE MARGARETH MENSAH, MP
VICE-CHAIRPERSON OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
(DEPUTY MINISTERIAL LEVEL)

ON THE
SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FOR THE REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

NEW YORK, 30 JUNE 1999

Mr. President,

Half a decade ago world leaders assembled in the capital city of Egypt, Cairo to address the challenges of population and development. They agreed on measures and actions to be taken by Governments and the international community as a whole, in order to enable all the people of the world to benefit in a sustained manner from development and thus lead healthy and prosperous lives. Today we are gathered here to reflect on the achievements we have made in implementing the Programme of Action adopted at the ICPD and decide together on how to overcome the remaining challenges so as not to leave any country behind as we prepare to enter the new millennium. It is in this spirit that Namibia participated at the ICPD then, and is doing so today at this Special Session.

Mr. President,

The major national development goals of Namibia are to sustain economic growth, create employment, reduce inequalities and eradicate poverty. However, the realisation of these goals continues to be hampered by, inter alia, the population growth rate estimated at about 3.0 %. Thus, based on the social, economic and demographic characteristics of the population and future prospects, estimates and projections of the population suggest that the high growth rate is likely to increase further and continue for some time.

Mr. President,

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development was convened barely four years after Namibia's independence, at a time when Namibia did not have a comprehensive National Population Policy in place. However, Government had been taking actions to influence population and development inter-relationship in the form of population related programmes and projects, which in turn have led to the formulation of the National Population Policy for Sustainable Human Development. This now serves as a guide to all population and development activities in the country.

The success of the Government's policy formulation is largely attributed to the wider consultations with the different groups on the nature and direction of Namibia's population policy as well as the acceptability and feasibility to the population at large.

In accordance with the population policy, government established a National Advisory Committee on Population and Sustainable Development, which serves as the highest advisory body to the government on all matters pertaining to population and development. Government also reviewed the composition of the Inter-Agency Technical Committee on Population, which now serves as the technical body of the National Advisory Committee and is coordinating the five sectors of the population policy namely: health; gender; population development and education; population dynamics and; research and development.

In addition to the population policy, the government has put in place a number of other policies and laws, which have direct bearing on the Namibian population, particularly women, the youth, children, as well as people with disabilities and other formerly disadvantaged groups. However, the availability of financial resources needed, has been a formidable challenge to effectively implement these policies and programmes. Notwithstanding, the budgetary allocation of our government is a clear indication of the importance Namibia attaches to social development. For example, the allocation of total resources through the State Revenue Fund during the current (1999-2000) financial year prioritizes Education (26%) and Health (16%). This has been the pattern since independence. In this connection, let me acknowledge the important role played by our development partners in Namibia, by expressing my Government's sincere appreciation for their continuous assistance of our efforts, We also wish to express our gratitude to UNFPA as well as other UN Funds and Programmes and other UN Agencies. Their role was not only confined to complementing government resources, but they have also supported the priority sectors set by the government.

One of the specific objectives of the Namibia National Population policy is to improve the health and welfare of all Namibians. Having made notable strides in the process to achieve the above, there are still indicators of various high mortality rates. Maternal mortality is 225 per 100,000 live births, which is quite high by international standards. Diarrhoea, malnutrition, acute respiratory infections, immunisable diseases, tuberculosis, malaria, sexual transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS account for the majority of deaths. HIV/AIDS has rated number 1 killer in Namibia followed by Malaria. According to recent statistics, Namibia rates third among countries with the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates.

With an increased number of women in child bearing age infected with HIV and a prenatal transmission rate of up to 35%, childhood AIDS is expected to be a serious problem. At the same time, an increase in the number of orphans, which goes concomitant with an accelerated mortality among adults, will require increased efforts in providing social services both by government and other sectors.

Like in many other countries, another crucial area that needs urgent attention in Namibia is Adolescence reproductive and sexual health. The high incidence of teenage pregnancy in Namibia remains a serious development constraint. Furthermore, it has also been noted that rates of early sexual activities lead to sexual transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. Most Namibian adolescents are exposed to sexual transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. It is, therefore not surprising that Namibia attaches great importance to reproductive and sexual health of the adolescents.

Mr. President,

The major challenge to the implementation of Namibia's population policy and programmes is the lack of financial resources coupled with inadequate capacity. Simply put, no developing country can successfully implement the Cairo Programme of Action on its own. It is in this spirit that the Southern African Development Community member states have been coming together to address common population and development issues. Namibia will continue to support regional and international efforts on population and development.

Increased solidarity among the international community and allocation of the necessary financial resources is indispensable for the full implementation of the commitment our leaders made at the International Conference on Population and Development. This calls for developing countries to be provided with both development assistance and investment in productive sectors to support employment creation and economic growth using available resources.

It is in the interest of humanity that those who are affluent today support the majority who are more disadvantaged now, only then can we ensure a better tomorrow for all.

I thank you!