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*Statement by*

**Honourable Omkar Prasad Shrestha,**  
Minister of Industries

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Head of the Delegation of Nepal

*to the 21<sup>st</sup> Special Session of the United Nations 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*

New York, 02 July 1999

Mr. President,

I would like, first of all, to extend to you the congratulations of the Nepalese delegation on your election as President of the twenty-first special session of the General Assembly. We are confident that under your wise leadership this Assembly will succeed in establishing new milestones in furthering the ICPD goals of ensuring the rights and well-being of present and future generations of women and men of this world. My delegation assures you of our full cooperation in the conduct of this session.

Mr. President, we would like to take this opportunity to commend the untiring and visionary efforts of Dr. Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, who was instrumental in the success of ICPD in Cairo five years ago and who continues to be a driving force behind this special session of the General Assembly.

The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo was indeed a landmark event. The Conference reached a global consensus in adopting a comprehensive Programme of Action, which underscores the integral and mutually reinforcing linkages between population and development. The Programme of Action is also path-breaking in its endorsement of a new rights-based approach to meeting the needs of individual women and men rather than achieving just the demographic goals.

Nepal remains committed to the ICPD consensus and has taken several initiatives in the last five years towards attaining the goals of ICPD despite all the understandable constraints of a land-locked least developed country, which I hardly need to elaborate. Let me share some of our significant initiatives with this august gathering.

- A National Population Committee has been established, in addition to the existing Population and Social Committee of the Parliament, with a view to deepening the nation's commitment to population and development issues. The Prime Minister himself chairs this Committee comprising, among others, all concerned Ministers. The civil society is broadly represented in the Committee.
- A separate Ministry of Population and Environment has been created to advocate, facilitate, co-ordinate and monitor actions aimed at the integration of population concerns in the development policies and programmes of the country.
- Legislative measures have been taken to further empower women and ensure their reproductive health rights. Mainstreaming of gender issues in development policies and programmes has been adopted as our national policy. A separate Ministry of Women and Social Welfare has been established to advocate, facilitate and co-ordinate actions to empower women.
- We have adopted a National Health Policy, formulated by the Ministry of Health, which recognises the reproductive and sexual health rights of women, adolescents and youths. In line with this policy, a comprehensive Reproductive Health Strategy has been developed and is being implemented.
- In line with the 20:20 initiative of the Social Summit in Copenhagen, Nepal has been allocating increasing proportion of its national budget to the social sector programmes, especially the priority programmes such as primary health care, basic education and rural water supply.

- Policy and legislative framework is now in place to empower communities and community-based organisations to manage their natural resources and development efforts.

I am happy to note, Mr. President, that Nepal's efforts are bearing encouraging results. Nepal is witnessing the onset of demographic transition. Both fertility and mortality levels have come down in recent years. Gender gaps in school enrolment have witnessed a significant reduction. Health services are now more accessible. There is greater participation of women in the political process with a minimum of 20% women's representation guaranteed in elected village and district-level bodies. Political representation of women in the national legislature is increasing. Nepal has a vibrant and active civil society which is not only on the vanguard of advocating issues such as human rights and empowerment of women but is also complementing government and community efforts in the implementation of sustainable social and economic development activities.

Notwithstanding these positive trends, formidable challenges lie ahead for Nepal. The social and human development indicators are still one of the lowest in the world and the pace of improvement has been slow. Unfortunately, the post-Cairo period was one marked by a rapid succession of governments in Nepal. It is a matter of gratification that in the third general elections after the restoration of multiparty parliamentary democracy in the country, held just a month ago, the people of Nepal have decided to rectify this situation by voting into power a stable majority government for the next five years.

The new government has started its work in earnest and has high expectations from the review and appraisal process of ICPD initiated in The Hague last February. This special session of the General Assembly is the culmination of this review process. The measures to be adopted here for progress towards the goals of ICPD should be forward-looking and something that further builds on the architecture we created in Cairo.

Mr. President, Nepal feels that the proposals for key actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of ICPD prepared by the Commission on Population and Development, thanks to the dedicated and tireless efforts of its Chairman, are practical and reasonably forward-looking and as such, deserve our endorsement.

Thank you.