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**STATEMENT BY TOINE VAN DONGEN
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION
OF THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS
TO THE 21ST SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(ICPD + 5)**

NEW YORK, 1 JULY 1999

Señor Presidente, distinguidos delegados, señores y señoras,

La delegación de los Países Bajos tiene el honor de felicitar al Sr. Opertti en ocasión de su elección como Presidente de esta Sesión Extraordinaria de la Asamblea General.

Desgraciadamente, la señora Eveline Herfkens, Ministro para la Cooperación de Desarrollo, ha tenido que responder a otros asuntos de importancia y por lo tanto no podemos contar hoy con su presencia. Ella lamenta su ausencia y les desea a todos los delegados una fructuosa sesión.

Mr. President,

While associating my delegation fully with the remarks made yesterday by the German delegate on behalf of the European Union, I would like to highlight a number of points. Notably, I wish to offer observations on three issues:

- The strategic importance of the Cairo Conference in relation to the other major UN conferences of this decade,
- its implementation, and
- further challenges.

Strategic Importance

In his opening statement, the Secretary-General pointed out that the Cairo Conference of five years ago was not "an isolated event". I would like to underscore that point. In the nineties, cities as far apart as New York, Rio de Janeiro, Vienna, Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing, Istanbul and Rome came to be connected in a new and meaningful way. Matters as diverse as children, environment, human rights, population, social policy, women, shelter and food were discussed at summits in these venues, summits that brought about a historic consensus among the Member States of the United Nations. As Mr. Kofi Annan emphasized, these large areas of human concern were not dealt with in isolation but in relation to development. Together they produced a consensus on a common development strategy: For the first time, nations joined in acknowledging specific responsibilities in each of these areas. For the first time, too, they set policy objectives, and agreed on joint strategies to achieve them.

This Special Session should carry forward the population agenda as an integral part of the new, common development strategy that came out of the nineties. Of course, our debate will also touch upon other dimensions of the global development agenda. This is how it should be. Development with a human face is a comprehensive notion. It relates to all spheres of life and addresses the vital needs of children, young people, women and men all over the world.

A common development strategy has to build upon what unites us, recognize what sets us apart, and bridge the gap wherever we are kept apart to our disadvantage. The Cairo Programme of Action is a remarkably balanced reflection of shared values, while respecting cultural and religious differences. "Cairo" addresses highly sensitive and personal aspects of human life, such as sexuality and reproductive health. Yet, the Programme of Action-offers the potential radically to improve the quality of life and to release new energies for development.

Implementation

Mr. President, the mandate of this Special Session is to assess the **implementation** of the Programme of Action - not to renegotiate it, nor to negotiate a new one. For the Netherlands the Programme of Action stands! We want to know about progress and we want to know about problems, as both may give us clues towards more successful population policies. Some months ago, population experts already had an opportunity to talk about clues. The Hague Forum offered them an instructive, vivid and at times even racy opportunity to share ideas and exchange views and experience. Since then, at the prepcom steered by Ambassador Chowdhury, our experts have identified priority areas and key future actions to enhance implementation.

Further Challenges

Let me now mention briefly some of the priorities as seen by the Netherlands Government.

To us, *the* crucial element of the new development strategy is that we should invest more in people. If we want them to fulfil their human potential, we must invest in their education, their health, their personal development and their well-being. In the area of population policies that means:

- One: invest more, much more in reducing maternal mortality. Dramatically, we are going to miss the target to reduce maternal mortality by half by next year. That prospect we find most disturbing.
- Two: reproductive health care, including family planning, is crucial to reduce maternal mortality, but is actually also of vital interest to everyone. Refugees, adolescents and men so far have been underserved in particular. Also: reproductive health care should not be left as the exclusive responsibility of specialists and special clinics, it should be easily accessible, a part of basic health services.
- Three: access to reproductive and sexual health services, including emergency contraception and safe abortions if so desired, should also be made available in special situations. Case in point are the women refugees from Kosovo who had been raped by Serbian soldiers.

- Four: much more should be invested in information, sexual and reproductive health education and care for youth and adolescents. Roughly 20% of the world population now is between 15 and 24 years old. In many countries, the group between 10 and 19 years old represents more than half of the population. They are the future - invest in them. The proposal by youth **NGO's** to spend at least 20% of total funding available for population activities on adolescents and to involve them actively in defining and executing these activities is certainly not unreasonable.
- Five: men should be involved much more in reproductive and sexual health, as **beneficiaries**, as family members, as partners, but also as members of society.
- And six: the devastating trail left by AIDS in a growing number of countries calls for much firmer action than has been mobilised so far. We need to strengthen the UN's **anti-AIDS** alliance under the umbrella of UNAIDS and we need to provide it with adequate means. Ideally, what we need in addition goes far beyond the level of primary health care. Hereto, what we need are role models in the top of society. We need leadership. Without leadership we are bound to fail in achieving the change in basic **mindset** that is needed among the population at large. Without change in **mindset**, all other measures will be less effective.

So far my list of some of the most urgent challenges. How to meet them? How to enhance implementation of the Program of Action? My delegation offers the following suggestions.

- **All Governments** should step up their efforts. They should mainstream and prioritise population policies, make available the necessary funding, and involve civil society, including **NGO's**, to enhance implementation at the grass roots level. For developing countries it would be untenable to argue that, without external aid, population policies inevitably fall short of the mark. Once basic primary health care structures are in place in a country, population policies are relatively cheap to pursue. It is a question of political will, rather than one of resources!
- At the international level, existing strategic alliances should be further developed. UNFPA traditionally is the key player. Donors, in particular the underperforming donors, should drastically increase their support for this star UN-agency. Other parts of the UN-system, such as WHO, the World Bank, UNICEF and UNAIDS have joined UNFPA in recent years in population related activities. We applaud this, while pushing for a clear division of **labour** between them, so that the comparative advantages of each of them are being utilized to the maximum. To emphasize the importance of population policies, some donor governments, including my own, have decided to earmark at least 4% of their total ODA for this crucial policy area.

- The role of civil society, including religion-based organizations, is of decisive importance. Let me salute the immensely important contributions many **NGO's** are making. In terms of education, advocacy, stimulating public debate, and insistence on a rights-based approach, they often lead the way and complement governmental activities. Many of them are highly valuable partners and deserve our full attention.
- While integrating population and development policies, the Cairo Programme of Action takes a so-called “rights-based approach”. In doing so, it defines rights and responsibilities of individuals, family members, providers of health services, civil society, governments and international agencies. The updated Programme of Action deserves the full support of all, not only in its population and development policies, but also in its human rights agenda. The rights-based approach, while recognizing differences, is not negotiable.

Mr. President,

In a few months time, this planet will carry six billion passengers. In Cairo, the realization was born that the world needs to be serious about maximum seating **capacity**. The effects are beginning to show. Hopefully, in five years time, as next we meet to assess progress, we can certify that the effects of Cairo are being consolidated.