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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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**STATEMENT
BY**

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**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF
SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE
UNITED NATIONS**

**TO THE
SPECIAL SESSION
FOR THE
REVIEW AND APPRAISAL
OF THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION
OF THE **ICPD****

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

30 JUNE 1999

Mr President
Distinguished Delegates

When the Cairo Programme of Action was adopted, our South African democracy was still in its infancy. Our leaders were new in office, but rich with ideas of what kind of society we wanted to build for ourselves. Over the past five years, we began to put life into the Cairo Document. Our national plan for social development already incorporates the ideas that began in Cairo. The endorsement for the policies of our Government were clearly demonstrated at our recent second democratic elections when more South African citizens affirmed their support for the Government than was the case during the historic 1994 election.

As we open this Special Session today, my Government is optimistic that this Special Session will adopt a forward looking and action-oriented document which will provide guidance on how to proceed in the further implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action. South Africa views the proposed key actions as pivotal to the national, regional and global population and development agenda.

Recognising the inequalities that women have suffered, South Africa's Constitution embodies gender equality and the progressive implementation of basic social rights such as access to education and health, including reproductive health. It protects the individual's right to control his or her own body, and it also includes freedom from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

South Africa strongly supports the objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action. However, we believe it does not suffice to focus only on reproductive health and rights. In addition, we need to create enabling socio-economic conditions for individuals to exercise their rights. Our social development programmes and macro-economic growth policies aim to change the determinants of the country's population dynamics in such a way that these trends are consistent with the achievement of

human-centered sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

Mr President

My country remains a land of stark contrasts, of racially defined haves and have-nots and continuing gender inequality. Over the past five years our agenda has been to remove structural barriers to full participation among the previously marginalised, to create equitable access to resources and services, especially for women and children and to empower and enable them to achieve their full potential. In addition to numerous **sectoral** policies and legislation aimed at transforming the delivery system, South Africa is allocating nearly two thirds of its national budget to the social sector. The government is providing free access for pregnant and lactating mothers and children under the age of six at all levels of health care. Particular actions by my government, which are aimed at empowering women, include the improvement of women's access to credit, the removal of discriminatory customary legislation, and facilitating women's involvement in small and medium enterprises.

The latest census reflects a total population of about 40.5 million of which 44 per cent are below the age of 20 years. The proportion of teenage mothers remains unacceptably high at around 15 per cent. This clearly demonstrates the urgent need to address youth and adolescent reproductive and sexual health and sexual rights. South Africa is translating its constitutional commitment to the individual's right to control his or her body. To this end, . life-skills and sexual education curriculum has been developed to be incorporated into the national school curriculum.

Mr President

My country **recognises** that unsafe abortion is a major public health hazard. As many as 44 000 women per year visited hospitals for

treatment for the complications of unsafe abortions. In response to this, and in compliance with the constitutional right to reproductive health, my government passed the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act which removes barriers to women's right to choose. To date, over 50 000 women have accessed safe termination of pregnancy services, which incorporate before and after **counselling** and post-termination contraception. Furthermore, maternal mortality has been declared a notifiable event in order to monitor and address preventable causes of death during pregnancy.

The southern African sub-region has become the epicentre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The infection rate of 1 600 a day in South Africa is among the highest in the world with young women and the poor being most vulnerable. This is essentially a gender equality and rights issue. It brings the question of human rights into the terrain of sexuality, since one of the major causes is lack of empowerment of women to negotiate safer sex, and the frequency of violence within sexual relationships.

South Africa's demographic profile is expected to be severely affected by the HIV/AIDS onslaught which will also have devastating socio-economic consequences. Having been **recognised** as more than just a health issue, the HIV/AIDS campaign is a national political priority, led at the Presidential level and is aimed at changing behaviour and attitudes, beyond mere awareness. A major stumbling block in addressing the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is the high cost of **anti-AIDS** drugs. This requires commitment to address pricing structures by major multi-national pharmaceutical companies, as well as the mobilisation and provision of new and additional resources to assist developing countries to access medical interventions against HIV/AIDS.

Mr President

South Africa and the rest of the developing world will face a number of

challenges related to the population and development agenda in the twenty-first century. These challenges include the shortage of reliable population and development data and information, insufficient monitoring and evaluation systems for the implementation of the population policy, and inadequate technical skills for modelling and integrating population concerns into development planning and project design. In order to effectively address these challenges at the national level, we **recognise** the need for strong partnerships which should include civil society, the private sector and the international donor community.

The Cairo Programme of Action already articulates a comprehensive approach to issues related to population and development. It identifies a range of demographic and social goals to be achieved over a twenty year period. South Africa believes that, by building on the success of Cairo, and upon the progress already achieved, this Special Session should give further impetus to the promotion of gender equality, the empowerment of women, and to securing the rights of adolescents to make informed choices about their sexuality and reproductive health. The successful implementation of the Programme of Action at all levels can only be to the benefit of all countries.

I thank you.