



As WRITTEN

SRI LANKA

Statement
by

Minister of Health & Indigenous Medicine of Sri Lanka,
The Honourable **Nimal** Siripala de Silva

delivered by

Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka
Ambassador John de **Saram**

Thursday July 1, 1999

Special Session of the **General** Assembly
on the Overall Review & **Appraisal** of
The Programme of Action of the **International**
Conference on Population & Development

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Mr. President,

The Honourable Minister of Health and Indigenous Medicine of Sri Lanka, Mr Nimal Siripala de Silva, was hoping to attend this Special Session of the General Assembly. He was, unfortunately, unable to do so.

I have the honour, therefore, to read to the General Assembly the Statement he would have made if he were here today.

His Statement is as follows,

I wish to join previous speakers in congratulating you, Mr President, on your unanimous election as Chairman of this Special Session of the General Assembly. I extend to you the greetings and the good wishes of the Government of Sri Lanka for a most successful stewardship of this Special Session. I wish to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the United Nations Population Fund for arranging for this Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme of Action that was approved in Cairo, in 1994, by the International Conference on Population and Development; - a Programme of Action that was later adopted, in 1994, by the General Assembly.

Sri Lanka is privileged to share with others in this Hall the experience it has gained in its implementation of the goals of the Programme of Action. Sri Lanka has initiated policies and programmes, over the past five years, to achieve a sustained economic growth in which population and reproductive-health related goals were an integral part.

Sri Lanka's efforts to improve literacy, to eliminate poverty, to empower women, to achieve economic progress - efforts which we believe to be unique in the South Asian **context-** have contributed to the reduction in the rate of population growth. Enlightened population policies and programmes. have brought about significant improvement in the quality of life of the people, and significant fertility and mortality reductions.

Yet the changing demographic scene has brought into focus a host of important emerging issues that need to be addressed in the coming decades.

Sri Lanka has made a paradigm shift: from Family Planning to Reproductive-Health. The new Population and Reproductive Health Policy of the Government addresses the crucial population and reproductive health issues. As delegations are, of course, aware, these are issues **that** include: safe motherhood; sub-fertility; induced abortion; reproductive tract infections; sexually transmitted diseases; promotion of economic migration and urbanization and the control of their adverse effects; enhancement of public awareness as to population and reproductive health; and, of course, strengthening the infrastructure necessary for implementation and co-ordination at national and sub-national levels.

There are **fundamental** changes taking place in the age-structure of the population of Sri Lanka. The “Adolescent”, the “Youth” and the “Elderly” of Sri Lanka are expected to grow significantly during the next decade. As to the last two such segments – “Youth” and “Elderly” - Sri Lanka will realise, in absolute terms, the largest number of “young” and, the largest number of “old” in its demographic history.

The process of modernization imposes ever-increasing strains on the Youth. Drug abuse, sexual harassment, child prostitution, adolescent pregnancies and suicides cause concern. We see the need to promote responsible sexual behaviour,

There is need to mitigate the effects of such social problems. The following measures have been identified as necessary as a matter of policy, and they are presently being implemented: provision of adequate information and education on **family life**; the inclusion of sex-education and education in ethical behaviour in school curricula; the strengthening of **youth-worker** education by means of information on drug abuse and sex-related problems at vocational training centers, institutions of higher learning, and work places; promotion of **counselling** on drug and substance abuse, human sexuality and psycho-social problems especially through the National Youth Service Council and non-governmental organizations; and implementation of programmes such as **counselling** to minimize the incidence of suicides among the youth.

The problems of the “elderly” of Sri Lanka are of great concern to the Government, as well. Approximately 20 per cent of Sri Lanka’s population will be over 60 years of age by the year 2025. **The** new Population and Reproductive Health Policy of the Government set out strategies and measures **for** the provision of adequate health care and **welfare** services to the elderly. They include such measures as: the provision of incentives to families to care for their elderly at home; the provision of special care units for the elderly within the State Health-Care system; encouragement of the private sector, non-government organizations, and local communities to provide, to the elderly, community care and community services.

An effective National Family Planning Programme, with wide outreach, has contributed considerably to the decline in the fertility rate: the average now being a mother with two children. There are the problems, however, of unwanted pregnancies, and of the increase in the incidence of sub-fertility.

Thus, on the one hand, our progress in Sri Lanka has been satisfactory. But there are, at the same time, a large number of emerging population and reproductive-health issues that remain. And they are issues that we **cannot** ignore.

We must, of course, do all that is possible within Sri Lanka to address our own difficulties.

Sri Lanka is among those countries that have utilized, and **utilised** well, domestic and **international** resources in the realization of its demographic reproductive-health and development objectives.

Yet, the magnitude of the challenges that face us, are, we believe, still there; and we must, in such circumstances, make our appeal for greater resource allocation by the international Community. The support of the international community would be of fundamental and of inestimable value.

I thank you.
