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STATEMENT

by

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of the United Nations General Assembly

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Dear Mr. President,

Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to sincerely congratulate H.E. Mr. Didier Operti on his election as a Chairman of the 21st Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly for the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and to express my confidence that his extensive diplomatic experience and impressive knowledge will help bring about a successful outcome to the current special session and accomplish its goals.

After achieving its independence, a new epoch began in the history of the Republic of Uzbekistan, starting from August 31, 1991. From this day, multinational people of our country have begun construction of a democratic, legal state and the formation of a civil society. Past years have shown that independence and sovereignty are invaluable achievements not only for one person, but also for all society as a whole. The experience, we have acquired in such a short period of time of independent development of our country, has demonstrated that success achieved in the realization of economic, social and political reforms would not be possible without skillful handling of the complicated process of national consolidation and securing sustainable interethnic consent in society.

Uzbekistan has been carrying out a number of measures for the development and realization of our national policy, specifically aimed at revival of Uzbek state system and preserving the integrity of Uzbekistan as a multinational country, developing and strengthening the self-awareness, as well as supporting spiritual revival of the Uzbek people.

Representatives of more than one hundred nationalities are living on the territory of the republic. This factor predetermines constant attention of the government to create all necessary conditions for the free, mutually enriching development of all people living in our country and harmonizing relations between them.

Historical experience proves that during the difficult conditions of transition, when, as a rule, social tension sharply escalates and civil conflicts become more likely, maintaining social stability is the **first** and most important priority of the state.

Supporting the socially vulnerable groups of the population, assisting the population in adapting to new conditions, and neutralizing sharp social contradictions and inevitable difficulties must be of highest priority for the democratic state. Realization of a strong social policy directed toward providing reliable social guarantees and measures of social protection for the population at all stages of market transitions is the main principle of our approach toward the renovation and progress of Uzbekistan.

In this regard the new mechanism of social protection of the population, has been developed on the basis of foreign experience and taking into account the national peculiarities of our country. An emphasis has been placed to the provision of assistance to families in need, realization and development of mechanism of addressed social protection of the population with the aim of liquidation of equalizing and psychology of dependence. A distinctive feature of the new system of social protection is a strictly differentiated approach to various groups of the population.

The corner stone of our social policy is our orientation toward support of the family. Specifics of the national mentality and the population's way of life have been taken into account. Assistance to families in need through local self-governing committees has received a

broad support. This approach has centuries-old roots and provides the most advanced distribution of means in offering support to socially vulnerable groups. This mechanism of providing material assistance fully encompasses and uses national traditions of mutual **support**.

The **government** of Uzbekistan has developed a program of Concrete **Measures on Realization of Interests of the Person**. It envisages the settlement of a complex of interconnected tasks, directed to the:

- Realization of protecting the social and economic rights of the person;
- Protection of human rights and legal support to person;
- Creation of conditions for the realization of cultural, spiritual and intellectual interests of the people.

The realization of this program renders special beneficial influence to the status of women in society, creating conditions for their increased involvement in social and political progress.

Policy conducted by the government of the republic provided women of Uzbekistan with conditions for their active involvement to the activity of international women movement. This is sharply illustrated by the participation of the governmental delegation from Uzbekistan in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995.

The 1999 National Program of Measures on Strengthening the Role of Women in family, state and public construction, and developing the system of protecting their legal, social, economic and spiritual interests, as well as scientific-practical center «OILA» («**Family**»), which conducts researches and resolves problem of family, are functioning in the republic.

Accession of Uzbekistan to the UN Conventions «**On Liquidation of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**»), «**On Reducing the Duration of Work to Forty Hours Per Week**»), ((Protection of Maternity and Childhood)>), as well as ((Declaration and Platform of Actions of the Fourth World Conference on **Women**)» have reconfirmed once again that improvement of the status of women in the republic is one of the priorities of our State.

The participation of women in political and public activities is one of the important tools in achieving equal rights. The inclusion of women into different non-governmental organizations on the basis of their professional, social and cultural interests and their particular goals has greatly expanded in our country.

Presently, there are a significant amount of non-governmental organizations (**NGOs**) in Uzbekistan, most of them view their main goal of their activity in the realization of equal rights and opportunities for men and women, increasing the status of women in the family and society, and assisting their adaptation to new social economic conditions.

One of the first women organizations of the republic – the Committee of Women of Uzbekistan - actively participates in the programs of UNDP ((Women in Development)) and «**Gender in Development**>), which are directed toward promoting the potential of women, and to expand their opportunities in this time of transition.

Within the framework of these programs a bureau on Gender and Development was created, which coordinates the activities of governmental, public and non-governmental organizations, promoting strategies of development in all spheres while taking into account gender factors.

The new post of Deputy Prime Minister for Social Protection of Family, Maternity and Childhood was established in order to promote women's active involvement in the decision-

making process of issues of social, economic, and cultural development, strengthening social protection of family, maternity and childhood, and coordinating the activities of ministries, departments, and regional administrations in this direction. Appropriate positions - deputies of the heads of regional administrations - were then established in all regional and territorial structures of the executive branch of the republic.

A national platform and plan of action on improvement the situation of women in Uzbekistan and increasing their role in society have been developed and endorsed at a governmental level. About 13 million US dollars and 28 billion *soms* were allocated in 1998-99 only for its financing.

The year of 1999 has been announced in Uzbekistan as the «Year of the Woman»). In this regard, a national program for 1999 on measures aimed at the strengthening the role of women in family, state and public construction, and perfecting the system of protection of their legal, social and spiritual interests was developed and is currently under realization. 831.9 thousand US dollars and 65 billion *soms* were allocated from the state's budget for its realization.

The development of a constructive dialogue between the government and NGOs has become one of the major objectives of legislative and executive authorities of Uzbekistan.

With this purpose, cooperation with the bureau on democratic institutes and human rights within the framework of the project on ((Interaction between NGOs and Government)) is being actively developed. Special attention is being paid to interaction with NGOs in the field of observing human rights in accordance with international norms, and as is stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, along with UN documents, specialized agencies, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Legislative documents of the republic on the protection of the rights and interests of women, along with the Constitution of our country, and codes of laws on labor, family and citizenship testify that legal base, corresponding to the international norms, has been established.

The radical restructuring of the economy and the spiritual life of Uzbekistan has created significant changes in the process of strengthening the status of women in society and the family. The national policy is aimed at the realization of the principle of equal rights and freedoms and the creation of equal opportunities for women according to the Constitution of Uzbekistan.

In addressing issues of public health, the government of Uzbekistan gives its most serious attention to the upbringing of highly **moral**, spiritually advanced and physically healthy generations. In coordinating efforts in this direction, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted on December 3, 1993 a resolution entitled «Complex Decisions in the Challenges of Growing a Healthy Generation»). On the basis of this resolution a number of documents regulating activities of public health care bodies in the field of reproductive health has been developed by the Ministry of Public Health.

Eight ministries, over 10 departments, funds, public organizations, and local bodies of authority participated in the realization of this program. The program is technically and financially supported by the UN Development Program, the UN Population Fund, the UN Children's Fund, the World Public Health Organization, as well as by donor countries such as the United States, Germany, Japan, Italy, Israel, Turkey and others.

One of the leading objectives of all of this activity is to perfect the system of family planning.

In developing a theoretical basis for the complex approaches to the problem of **family** planning, the Ministry of Public Health took into account national traditions, cultural and social factors, and moral and religious aspects of this issue.

The creation of a wide network of offices on family planning, improvement of employment qualification, mass media activities, and activities of local self-governing committees has created a favorable atmosphere in working to overcome challenges of family planning and women's health. In its turn, it has created solid ground for expanding the programs on issues of reproductive health and family planning.

One of the peculiarities of the demographic situation in Uzbekistan is a historically formed high birthrate, the level of which in 1991 was 34.5 for every 1000 of the population. In 1995 as a result of systematic and balanced work in family planning there was a sustained tendency toward decreasing birthrates. Thus, if in 1995 the birthrate was 29.8 out of every 1000, in 1998 it was down to 23.3.

Major high birthrate factors in Uzbekistan are:

- Large specific gravity of the rural population, where factor of birth rate is higher;
- High numbers of marriages and a low numbers of divorces;
- Early marriages and large number of women not participating in public production because of having several children;
- Low territorial mobility of the local population

Under these conditions, the insufficient account of the complexities of the economic and social transformations, and adverse ecological conditions in separate regions of the country, especially in the Aral sea region, could cause such negative phenomena as reduction of consumer levels, growth of unemployment or incomplete employment, and increased economic pressures on the able-bodied part of the population.

As well as many other countries in the world, Uzbekistan has a state system of social insurance, which is used to protect the population from possible social risks, including temporary illness, old age, physical incapacity, and loss the supporting head of the home. The basic objective of this system is to provide economic support to families in **difficult** financial situation, render social assistance to the elderly, particularly women, and to organize social and physical rehabilitation of the physically impaired.

The most important part of social protection of Uzbekistan's population is the state pension system. It is worthwhile to mention that the legislation gives women significant advantages and privileges in issues of pension provisions. Two basic advantages among them are: a lower age requirement for retirement and lower duration of work experience required for this purpose. Facilitated terms for women's retirement influence the number of pensioners and structure of the pensions. Presently, women consist of about 53 % in the total number of pensioners; that is 2.5 % more than the share of women in an aggregate number of the population.

There are about 2 1.9 thousand single and physically impaired pensioners in Uzbekistan. Almost 14.3 thousand of them use privileges, as well as at no charge are provided basic meals and hygiene. About 19.5 thousand people receive home visiting service from the state. It is necessary to note that home visiting services are provided by the state and the Red Cross and Red Crescent. More than 2.6 thousand social workers are involved in the home visiting service through state bodies of social maintenance.

Since 1994 the system of social protection in Uzbekistan has undergone serious

changes, and this is connected to the country's transition **from** general social protection to maintaining reliable social guarantees and support for the most vulnerable groups of the population. This brings this system together with similar systems in countries with market economies, basic task of which is to help those who because of objective reasons cannot support themselves.

One of the most serious problems for Uzbekistan is the ecological crisis, created by the shriveling of the **Aral** Sea. Ecological degradation of the environment in the **Aral** Sea region has especially had an effect on women and children. In this region, a significant number of pregnant women and children suffer anemia, and the level of maternity mortality remains high.

The Government of Uzbekistan has determined as one of the main priorities the reduction of the negative consequences of the Aral Sea crisis in regard to the health of the population and, first and foremost, to that of women and children of this region.

Guiding with this question the government of Uzbekistan strongly supported the joint initiative of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and "ECOSAN" International fund for the development of the "ASPERA" (Aral Sea: Regional Help to Children and Women) project in 1995.

This project is aimed at reducing the influence of worsening conditions of the environment on the health and well-being of children and women, as well as at realizing the social, economic, and **infrastructure** changes necessary to improve the standard of living of the people of this region.

Taking into account the scale of problems, occurred in the result of Aral Sea crisis, the negative consequences of which extend far beyond the region, I'd like to take this opportunity, once again, to draw the global community's attention to this continuing catastrophe and to appeal to the international organizations and donor-countries to support the efforts of the Central Asian countries in this issue.

In conclusion allow me to remind you of our common obligation «to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom») as it is proclaimed in the Charter of United Nations. We should realize the potential we have and use it in timely and right manner. Active participation of the people and countries of the world under the auspices of the United Nations in solving the array of population and development issues will allow us to unite and rally the people to make our world more sustainable and secure.

Thank you for your attention.

