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STATEMENT TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
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BY

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MR. CHAIRMAN

YOUR EXCELLENCIES

COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNFPA

Distinguished PARTICIPANTS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

It is a great privilege for me to address this august assembly on such an important topic as population. It is also a special honour for me to share with you the African Development Bank's experience in population and development strategies and programmes. Before I take up this task, allow me to express my sincere appreciation to the Egyptian authorities for hosting this important conference. It is the first time this decennial activity is being held here in Africa.

Africa is at a better vantage point today to elaborate on the demographic dimensions of its development than it was two decades ago. At Bucharest in 1974, the region's rapid population growth was seen by African countries as a symptom rather than the cause of the state of underdevelopment. Hence, there was a unanimous endorsement of the paradigm of "development" as the curative pill of rapid population growth and its attendant socio-economic development. Since then, Africa's experience with the engineering of economic growth has not been encouraging while the rate of population growth increased in the region; thus complicating the unfavorable trends of Africa's development as revealed by available indicators.

It is no wonder therefore that, a decade after Bucharest starting from the time of the World Population Conference in Mexico in 1984, most of the African countries changed their stance on population trends by accepting that the rate of population growth was too high and was undermining development efforts. African countries unanimously adopted the Kilimanjaro Plan of Action on Population. The plan lays

emphasis on the supply of family planning services; the provision of relevant information, education and communication channels; the voluntary adoption of family planning services by couples; as well as action programs that would reduce mortality, regulate migration, spatial distribution and urbanization, and address gender-based inequalities.

The outcome of the Kilimanjaro Plan of Action since 1984 has not impacted substantially on the adoption of modern family planning by African couples. However, it is encouraging to note that many African countries already have explicit population policies aimed at slowing the rate of population growth. Also, an equally large number of countries are in the process of adopting similar policies. Despite a wide gap between clear-cut policy goals and programme efforts, the Bank is encouraged by the example of a few countries in the region. These countries have shown that, with good family planning programmes and infrastructures, Africa's currently high rate of population growth can be attenuated.

For human resources to constitute the decisive factor of development, it is necessary for the rate of population growth to adjust to that of social and economic infrastructure, namely: education, health, employment and housing.

In Africa today, the burden of the dependent population resulting from the young age structure of the population, the large family size, increasing rural-to-urban migration and uncontrolled urbanization, are factors of demographic explosion that overwhelm existing economic and social infrastructures and consequently encumber development efforts. We are witnessing a fall in the supply of social services per inhabitant, the degradation of the environment, increase in poverty, the

destruction of the family unit and the extended family network, growth in the number of single mothers, street children and diseases, particularly AIDS.

In 1992, the Bank, against such a gloomy backdrop, organized a series of activities designed to further the understanding of the issues and to sensitize African decision-makers. The year witnessed a series of activities such as a symposium organized around the theme of "Population Policies for Sustainable Economic and Social Development in Africa" during the Bank Group's annual meetings. In addition, the focus of the annual African Development Report of the Bank Group was on Population. The discourse on population growth and its wider implications on the development process in Africa reached a critical stage in September, 1992. At this time, the Bank Group organized an International Technical Conference on Population at its headquarters in Abidjan. The conference which had as its theme, population growth and sustainable development in Africa, had the objective of reaching a broader understanding of the population dynamics in Africa in order to facilitate the formulation of a clear population policy statement for the Bank Group. All these events were well attended by a cross-section of African leadership.

The Bank has also developed a population policy whose main theme is that, in the short term, there is an urgent need to foster a policy climate in which men, women and couples should be able to choose their family size and when to have them with the aid of modern family planning services. Women in particular should be in a position to exercise this choice without pressure or coercion. This would, in the long term, imply giving them the means such as, education, health, employment opportunities etc. to take such decisions.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Bank Group intends to mobilize national, bilateral and multilateral resources to make modern family planning advice available to all those who would like to use them. It intends to strengthen programmes of human resource development e.g. in education, health, food supply etc. which have synergistic effects on desired family size and the potential demand for family planning services; to help regional member countries (RMCs) to develop population policies which are consistent with their overall development goals and have wider public support; to strengthen RMCs' institutional capacity to develop and implement successful population programmes; and to improve the coverage and quality of population programmes which provide reproductive health services in RMCs.

Mr. Chairman, your excellencies,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, in furtherance of these key strategies, the Bank Group, so far, has approved many health projects with reproductive health components in its operations. The Bank has also given technical assistance grants for relevant demographic studies. The Bank has increased its staff strength in population policy development and programme design. It is envisaged that other Bank sector policies and programmes would prioritize actions which impact on population issues. In order to improve inter-sectional work, plans are afoot to expose staff in the appropriate departments in the Bank to "population awareness" training. PROGRAMME and project development, review and monitoring processes will be reviewed to make them more responsive to the objectives of the Bank Group's population policy. Finally, cooperation with other agencies supporting population programmes has been initiated with the signing of a cooperation agreement between the

Bank Group and UNFPA in 1992, and the recent creation of an OAU/ECA/ADB/UNFPA Population Commission. These are only modest efforts compared to the enormity of the problem. We hope that this conference will provide further impetus for all to devote more resources to this activity so that Africa and indeed the developing world can get on with the task of human development.

Since rapid population growth has synergistic effects on poverty, environmental degradation, the status of women and sustainable development in general, the Bank Group has developed policies towards the enhancement of the development of women, poverty reduction, and environmental management. The Bank has also reflected its policy concerns in the lending programmes. For instance, the Third five-year operational PROGRAMME for the period 1992-96 earmarks 30 to 60 percent of the African Development Fund resources to agriculture and social sectors, as a way of combating absolute poverty in Africa. Besides, the seventh replenishment of the African Development Fund for the period 1994-96 is an important vehicle for generating new and additional resources, especially for reducing poverty and for protecting the environment, which it turn will have a sustained impact on family size in regional member countries.

Mr Chairman,

In a nutshell, the Bank's strategy rests therefore on the development of social and economic infrastructures (education, health, employment particularly of women and girls) in order to reduce in the long term the fertility rate. In the short term, family planning would rely on maternal and child services that engender a reduction in the currently high rate of infant mortality, and consequently the size of

the family through a conscious reduction in the number of desired children. From the Bank Group's standpoint, population issues in Africa should be addressed from these mutually reinforcing perspectives of human capital formation and programmes for attenuating rapid rates of population growth.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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