

CARICOM

STATEMENT

by

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to the

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sexually active; have multiple partners at an early age; do not use contraceptives and do not worry about **HIV/AIDS**.

The **rapidly increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS transmission** is of concern to the Region. The problems identified in this sector are the high prevalence of HIV /AIDS among youth; high mortality among the 15 – 25 age group attributed to AIDS; the absence of programmes which specifically address the treatment of HIV positive individuals; and the prohibitive cost of anti-retroviral drugs. It is projected that the direct cost of the epidemic plus the indirect cost due to loss of income will rise sharply and may be upwards of **US\$500M** by year 2006.

It is in this context that the Ministers responsible for Health within the Caribbean Cooperation in Health Phase II have set the goal of ensuring improvements in the quality, availability and appropriate use of Reproductive Health Services through strategies that include re-orienting the Health Services, promoting policies of reproductive health education for students in schools and working with **NGOs** to increase awareness of reproductive health rights and gender issues. The Ministers responsible for Health have agreed to pursue the goal of improving the health and quality of life of youth and by year 2009 expect to see an increase in the proportion of adolescents with healthy lifestyles.

The Conference of Heads of Government has also placed high priority on **Youth Development**. In March 1999, The Conference of Heads of Government received the views of youths developed during the Youth Summit held in September/October 1998 in Barbados. At this Youth Summit which was supported jointly by the CARICOM Secretariat, the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the **UNFPA**, a Caribbean Regional Declaration on Adolescent Health and Rights and a Regional Action Plan were prepared.

Caribbean countries have demonstrated the political and social will to achieve **Gender Equity**. This has been demonstrated through the establishment of Women's Bureaux and the signing of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); promoting and introducing measures to encourage male responsibility and participation. However there are still major problems to be addressed. These are high unemployment levels among women; inadequate protection for some categories of female workers namely, domestic workers and free zone employees; and the high incidence of gender- based violence against women in and outside the home continue to be major concerns for the Community.

The Caribbean countries have attempted to address these social problems in a context of mitigating circumstances. The first of these relates to the negative impact of **Migration**. The brain drain of critical skills away from the Caribbean; the increased risk from communicable diseases and the erosion of gains made in the eradication of measles and polio from CARICOM Member States; and the repatriation of illegal immigrants are areas of concern.

The second of these mitigating circumstances relates to **environmental factors**. The Caribbean suffers seasonally from natural disasters, which have devastating effects on the national resources of the islands whose main economic activities are based on tourism, commerce and agriculture. Usually the task of rebuilding economies and the stabilization of the social and emotional lives of the people of the sub-region is a tremendous burden on the already fragile economies.

The third mitigating circumstance relates to **the heavy debt burden**. The obligations of demanding debt servicing has limited the ability of CARICOM member states to make more financial provision for social services.

In spite of these constraints, Mr. President, the Caribbean countries **recognise the Interrelationship between Population, Sustained Economic Growth and Sustainable Development** and have articulated clear policy guidelines; **institutionalised** mechanisms for the incorporation of population variables into programmes and projects; and put structures in place to monitor the effects of socio-demographic trends and development strategies. However limited financial and human resources have restricted capacity to

develop / strengthen and maintain social statistical data bases and information systems so critical to social and economic planning, policy development, programme implementation and monitoring.

Consequently, Mr. President, the Caribbean countries need the continued understanding and support of the international donor community to achieve the full implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action in the following priority areas:

- ◆ The strengthening of information systems with relevant analysis and indicators and research to inform social and economic development planning; and programme monitoring and evaluation;
- ◆ Development of programmes targeting the youth to effect behavioural change and the provision of special services for youth;
- ◆ Provision of an expanded response to combat HIV/AIDS with special emphasis on both in-and out- of school youth;
- ◆ Stemming of the erosion of advances made in gender equity and social justice caused by the impact of poverty, globalization and debt repayment.
- ◆ The fostering of technical cooperation between supplier and receiving countries of migrants, paying particular attention to the participation in training activities and the sharing of training cost; the sharing of information to inform disease surveillance programmes; sharing of information on the repatriation of illegal immigrants;
- ◆ Closer collaboration between governments and civil society in the planning and implementation of programmes.

Mr. President, the Caribbean community is committed to continued implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action over the next five years.

Thank you Mr. President.