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AS WRITTEN

MESSAGE FROM H E. FLT.-LT. JERRY JOHN RAWLING

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA,

TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND
DEVELOPMENT

CAIRO, EGYPT

5 - 13 SEPTEMBER 1994

MR. PRESIDENT

I congratulate you warmly on your election to preside over our proceedings. I also thank the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for its generous hospitality.

MR. PRESIDENT

I have the honor to present to the Conference the following message from the President of the Republic of Ghana, H.E. FLT-Lt. Jerry John Rawlings:

?An important international conference such as this provides an opportunity to focus on the complexity of population issues in the world today, particularly the strong correlation between population, resources and the comprehensive development of the individual and the nation.

In the case of Ghana, the high population growth rate and the consequent youthful age structure of the population are two critical factors which have made the attainment of the country's development goals and objectives an onerous task. Even with the recent improvement in the economy resulting from the implementation of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes initiated by Government in the early

1980s and which is generally acknowledged as the most successful in Africa it is estimated that annual growth of the gross domestic product has to be around 8%, compared to the present rate of about 5% for per capita income to be restored to its 1960 level.

How have we respond to this challenge ?

The Government has taken a number of measures since the last International Conference on Population held in Mexico City in 1984. An recently, the fourth Republican constitution of the country has made it obligatory for the government to maintain a population policy that consistent with the aspirations of the people of Ghana.

In fact, I can even say that as far back as 1975 the National Council on Women and Development was established to formulate policies in the area of women and development. And in the recent past, the 31st. December Women's Movement, our largest women's NGO in the field in terms of both numbers and spatial distribution has awakened Ghanian womanhood to face the formidable challenges of positive self-realization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is not a woman's issue, it is a societal issue. We need our menfolk, those in farming and fishing, those in boardrooms, those in policy-making fora, and certainly those in executive positions to

change their attitudes towards women if we are to be successful in our quest for a more just society.

But, Ladies and Gentlemen, men women and children do not live in a vacuum. They live in a social and physical environment. This environment has been a major cause for concern since the basic needs of our people are placing increasing pressures on our resources. We are trying through our Environmental Action Plan, to optimize the use of our environment for the benefit of the benefit of the present and for generations as yet unborn. Another example is the action plan by our Ghana National Commission on Children, - THE CHILD CANNOT WAIT - under which we hope to give the children of Ghana a better start in life.

I will not bore you with too many examples. Let me focus on a few areas of concern.

The first relates to family planning. Ghana remains committed to the provision of integrated health services to our people, including family planning. This is because we believe in the individual as a whole, and in investing in individuals through education and improvement in living conditions which would enable them to make free and informed choices. This, Ladies and Gentlemen, is looking at the health and welfare of people and helping them in assuming responsible behavior.

Our concern in this area is not restricted to adults alone. Like many

other countries, developed and developing, it includes our young people and adolescents. We are all witnessing the increase, worldwide, of births to young adults who are less than 20 years old. In seeing this we have to admit that for some young adults advice and counseling are not enough. Adolescents, therefore, need education, care and attention and services that will provide them with the security and hope that they are looking for.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Up to now I have focused on the health aspects of the population issue and our conviction to provide reproductive health services that are accessible to our people.

I cannot end this aspect without mentioning the great controversy that has arisen out of the issue of abortion. Let me say right away that in Ghana we believe, as stated by the World Health Organization, that abortion and I repeat abortion, should NOT, I repeat NOT, be used as a method of family planning. However, there are health circumstances that require the interruption of pregnancy in which case it has to be performed under the safest and soundest scientific methods.. Having said this, it is up to each country within its own cultural values and norms, to decide.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the demographic aspects of population in the context of development. As many speakers have pointed out, people must not be seen as statistics but as individuals belonging to basic family units and small closely-knit communities with hopes, philosophies of life and aspiration which go beyond the physical.

Some of these are a sense of self-worth, the urge to preserve cultural mores, and the cumulative knowledge and those of their family group or nation. These are basic and very legitimate aspirations which lend themselves to fervent defence by all human societies.

I would like all of us to pause and reflect, for in countries such as ours in Africa, there has been a drive from developed countries to push population control programmes very vigorously, based on statistical logic. We do not quarrel with the logic, but we believe that a great deal can be learned from bitter past experience. Reports from our field workers show that our people have become highly suspicious of the birth control crusades. Some of these suspicion emanate from the fact that we do not worry about their needs first and improve their conditions. Also they are frequently suspicious about the drugs, methods and technology being promoted. They are not reassured that the methods will not harm them. Sometimes they feel they are guinea pigs for new drugs, and wonder most of all whether we ourselves use them before prescribing them to others.

Another issue of concern that must be addressed is the growing tendency of some donors to condition their aid in certain essential areas on the adoption by a recipient country of population programmes designed elsewhere. There is need for flexibility and respect for locally tailored programmes. Interventions based solely on the concept of population management interfere with the very foundation of life.

I leave you with these thoughts.

We believe that the time has come for all states to appreciate the need to put population issues in a broader context. Population to us means more than the control of numbers. Its related issues include, for example, the over concentration of people in specific areas. Measures aimed at discouraging the formation of huge urban centers and encouraging a fairly even spread by the wider distribution of the means for development and generation of wealth, become a matter of immediate and on going concern.

Profit centered reliance on market forces to the neglect of economic and development strategies that are truly people centered is only a recipe for disaster.

Population concerns must also include the challenges posed by the flow of people within large geographical areas such as the continent of

Africa. Africa as a whole is certainly not populated, and yet parts of the continent are under tremendous and unsustainable pressure due to a complex combination of factors.

This calls for a dispassionate and objective re-evaluation of the premium placed on existing national borders, a delicate issue that stirs deep nationalistic and patriotic emotions. Ghana's vision of African unity has always de-emphasized the limitations of unnatural borders whilst stressing the virtues of an organic whole.

At the same time the flow of millions of refugees from one part of the continent to another, whether to escape conflict, drought and other natural disasters or simply to seek greener pastures, places a heavy burden on the target areas.

While we concede that Africa bears the brunt of the responsibility for solving its population problems, we view with concern the striking cases of discrimination practiced by some developed countries against African Immigrations and those of African descent.

We are equally concerned about the continued consumption of a grossly disproportionate part of the world's resources by a small number of wealthy economies while control of population growth is vigorously advocated for poorer countries. There must be a commensurate advocacy aimed at curbing the insatiable appetite of wealthier economies for

more and more resources, which only widens the gap between the rich and the poor and at the same time sets before the poor aspirations towards life styles which are not globally sustainable.

The link between poverty and population growth can no longer be side-tracked. Poverty often breeds over-population. It is not a mere coincidence that the more affluent states have progressively lower population growth while the poorer countries experience unbridled escalation in their population growth

The need to work vigorously towards a more equitable World Order must be seen as an essential part of the battle for the sustainable well being of all people on the globe. Deterioration in the quality of human life cannot be confined to the poorer developing countries whilst the few well to do insulate themselves from the consequences. In the view of the Ghana Government, any discussion of population must be situated within the overall context of socio-economic development.

It is our hope that the final communique and resolutions of the Conference as well as the follow-up action will demonstrate clearly that a historic step has been taken to re-orient policies world-wide in the light of real and urgent problems that can no longer be side-stepped, so that by the end of this century the world will witness a substantial improvement in the quality of life of all its 6 billion inhabitants. This, Ladies and Gentlemen, places the population issues

as an essential aspect of socio-economic development.

Thank you..

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