

Statement to The Hague Forum, 8-12 February 1999

As written:

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY
HEAD OF DELEGATION OF THE
REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA TO
THE ICPD+5 INTERNATIONAL FORUM
(HAGUE FORUM)
8-12 February, 1999

MR. CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES, ON THE OCCASION OF THE MID-DECADE REVIEW OF THE PROGRAM OF ACTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT (ICPD), PERMIT ME TO BRING TO YOU, YOUR ABLE SECRETARIAT, THE DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES AND THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF THE NETHERLANDS GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT, HIS EXCELLENCY DR. CHARLES GHANKAY TAYLOR; THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA. I AM EQUALLY GRATIFIED, INDEED, TO EXTEND TO YOU THE CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT AND THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF THE NETHERLANDS OUR THANKS AND APPRECIATION FOR THE METICULOUS ARRANGEMENTS AND THE KIND HOSPITALITY ACCORDED MY DELEGATION SINCE OUR ARRIVAL IN THIS HISTORIC CITY OF THE HAGUE. I WISH TO EXPRESS THE HOPE THAT THE OUTCOME OF THIS FORUM WILL GO A LONG WAY IN ENHANCING FURTHER ACHIEVEMENTS OF PEOPLE-DEVELOPMENT IN THE SECOND FIVE YEARS OF THE TWENTY YEAR PROGRAM OF ACTION.

MR. CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES, LIBERIA WAS AMONG THE 179 COUNTRIES THAT ADOPTED THE PROGRAM OF ACTION OF THE ICPD IN CAIRO, EGYPT, IN SEPTEMBER 1994, AND WE EXPRESSED OUR COMMITMENT TO ITS IMPLEMENTATION, EVEN THOUGH AT THE TIME, WE WERE STILL GOING THROUGH A PERIOD OF CIVIL CRISIS IN OUR COUNTRY.

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PRIOR TO THE CIVIL CONFLICT IN 1990, AND IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CONFERENCES OF BUCHAREST AND MEXICO, THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA IN 1986 SET UP A NATIONAL POPULATION COMMISSION (NPC) TO SERVE AS ADVISORY BODY TO THE GOVERNMENT ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES. THAT BODY INCLUDES HEADS OF MINISTRIES, AGENCIES AND NATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS. SUBSEQUENTLY A NATIONAL POPULATION POLICY WAS PROMULGATED AND PASSED INTO LAW IN 1988, MAKING LIBERIA ONE OF THE FEW COUNTRIES IN AFRICA WITH AN EXPLICIT POPULATION POLICY FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. TO OPERATIONALIZE THE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION, A POPULATION POLICY CO-ORDINATION UNIT (PPCU) WAS ESTABLISHED AT THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS TO SERVE AS SECRETARIAT TO THE NPC, AND TO COORDINATE MONITORING OF THE IMPLEMENTATION.

MR. CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES: THE SEATING OF A POPULARLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT IN LATE-1997 HAS CREATED THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR INTEGRATION OF POPULATION CONCERNS INTO OUR DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES. THIS HAS CREATED THE OPPORTUNITY FOR GOVERNMENT TO HOLD NATIONAL CONFERENCES ON THE FUTURE OF LIBERIA AND TO FORMULATE STRATEGIES FOR THE MOBILIZATION OF LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBERIAN PEOPLE. PRESENTLY, GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO TRAIN MORE LOCAL POPULATION EXPERTS AT ITS INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN THE REGION, DEVELOP AND/OR REVISE SECTORAL

POLICIES INCLUDING THE 1988 POPULATION POLICY, AND ESTABLISH MORE PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CIVIL SOCIETY, INCLUDING NGOS.

MR. CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES: THE ISSUES OF GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN HAS IN RECENT TIMES CLAIMED PROMINENCE AMONG THE CIVIL SOCIETY. GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY ESTABLISHED A WOMEN AND CHILDREN AFFAIRS UNIT AT THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS TO MONITOR THE NETWORKING OF- THE VARIOUS NGOS INVOLVED IN WOMEN AND CHILDREN AFFAIRS AND THE VARIOUS WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS NOW OPERATING IN THE COUNTRY FOR THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVING THE STATUS OF LIBERIAN WOMEN. THE ASSOCIATION OF FEMALE LAWYERS IS VIGOROUSLY CAMPAIGNING FOR THE ELIMINATION OF TRADITIONAL PRACTICES THAT EFFECT THE HEALTH OF WOMEN, PARTICULARLY THE PRACTICE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION, AND FOR THE REPEAL OF LAWS WHICH DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN. WE REALIZE THAT THE EDUCATION OF THE GIRL CHILD IS FUNDAMENTAL IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN. IN THIS REGARD, THE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN DIRECT AND CONCRETE MEASURES TO IMPROVE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PRIMARY EDUCATION OF THE GIRL CHILD.

MR. CHAIRMAN, TO SENSITIZE MEN ABOUT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, STEPS ARE BEING TAKEN THROUGH GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONARIES AND NGOs TO PROVIDE INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE ELECTRONIC, PRINT AND OTHER TRADITIONAL MEDIA. ALSO TO EDUCATE THE YOUTH, STEPS

HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO REVISE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULA AND TO INTEGRATE POPULATION/FAMILY-LIFE EDUCATION.

THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA IS ALSO COMMITTED TO APPOINTING WOMEN TO KEY POSITIONS – INCLUDING AT THE LEGISLATIVE, JUDICIARY AND EXECUTIVE LEVELS, AS WELL AS AT THE AMBASSADORIAL AND CORPORATE LEVELS. THUS, PRESENTLY, THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF LIBERIA, MINISTER OF STATE FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, THE CHAIRPERSON-OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND HEALTH AND THE MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL PORTS AUTHORITY ARE ALL WOMEN.

THE GOVERNMENT FURTHER RECOGNIZES THE NEED FOR PROVIDING BASIC SKILLS TO WOMEN, ESPECIALLY IN THE IMMEDIATE POST-WAR ERA, AND COLLABORATES ACTIVELY WITH OTHER PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS IN THIS FIELD; HENCE, IT CONDUCTS SENSITISATION/AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN IN THE AREAS OF GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY, REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, AND PROVIDES TECHNICAL AND LIMITED FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING WOMEN AND YOUTH GROUPS.

HOWEVER, OUR GOVERNMENT EFFORTS IN CLOSING THE GENDER GAP ENCOUNTER SERIOUS CONSTRAINTS, INCLUDING A HIGH ILLITERACY RATE AMONG WOMEN AND ADHERENCE TO TRADITIONAL BELIEFS. THESE POSE DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING WOMEN RECOGNISE AND EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS.

FURTHER PROGRAMS, SUCH AS THE IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION OF THE GIRL CHILD STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN, ESTABLISHING LAWS ON DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN, AND ESTABLISHING MORE GENDER DESKS IN KEY AREAS OF GOVERNMENT ARE BEING CONSIDERED BY GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO OVERCOME THOSE CONSTRAINTS.

MR. CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED. DELEGATES, REGARDING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE THE GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGES COUPLES TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS TO DECIDE FREELY THE NUMBER AND SPACING OF CHILDREN AND THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES. THESE RIGHTS ARE EMBODIED IN THE 1988 POPULATION POLICY.

RECENTLY GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN NEW MEASURES TO IMPROVE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH-CARE SERVICES BY FORMULATING A POLICY ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (RH) AS PART OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH POLICY OF LIBERIA; TRAINING OF RH CARE PROVIDERS; PROVISION OF RH EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES AND MEDICINES (INCLUDING CONTRACEPTIVES) AND PROMOTING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RH CARE SERVICES.

ADDITIONALLY, POST-NATAL CARE AND COUNSELLING, ALONG WITH EXISTING COMPONENTS SUCH AS PRE-NATAL CARE, DELIVERY, TREATMENT OF REPRODUCTIVE TRACT INFECTIONS (INCLUDING STDs), FAMILY PLANING AND REFERRAL SYSTEMS AT ALL LEVELS OF THE HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM ARE BEING PROVIDED WHEREVER POSSIBLE. MR. CHAIRMAN, THE

GOVERNMENT HAS EMBRACED THE RH CARE APPROACH AS OPPOSED TO MCH/FP.

MR. CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES, OUR MAJOR IMPLEMENTING PARTNER OF THE PROGRAM OF ACTION IS THE FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION OF LIBERIA (FPAL), AN AFFILIATE OF THE PLANNED PARENTHOOD FEDERATION. IN FULFILMENT OF THE CAIRO PROGRAM OF ACTION, FPAL IS UNDERTAKING A NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES IN ITS CURRENT WORK PROGRAM BUDGET (1999). FPAL APPROACH IS TO ADDRESS UNMET NEEDS AS OPPOSED TO MERE DEMOGRAPHIC TARGETS. ALL ACTIVITIES ARE UNDERTAKEN WITH INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION, WITH HUMAN RIGHTS FORMING THE BASIS OF ALL PROGRAM ACTIVITIES. THE ASSOCIATION, HOWEVER, LACKS ADEQUATE TRAINED MANPOWER TO MEET SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH (SRH) NEEDS, AND ITS PHYSICAL FACILITIES ARE SKEWED TO A FEW URBAN AREAS; AND IT LACKS DIAGNOSTIC FACILITIES. IN THIS REGARD, THE ASSOCIATION IS MOST GRATEFUL TO UNFPA FOR THE INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE RECEIVED AND FOR THE CONTINUING PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THEM.

MR. CHAIRMAN, LET ME EXTEND MY SINCERE THANKS AND APPRECIATION, ON BEHALF OF MY GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE, TO THE UNFPA FOR HER COMMITMENT AND SUPPORT TO GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION. CURRENTLY, WITH THE SUPPORT OF UNFPA, THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA IS, AMONG OTHERS, REVITALISING THE DELIVERY OF RH SERVICES AND UNDERTAKING A

DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEY. THIS SURVEY, THE FIRST MAJOR POST-WAR DATA COLLECTION EXERCISE OF THE GOVERNMENT, IS INTENDED TO GENERATE CORE DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH INDICATORS, INCLUDING PARAMETERS OF POPULATION, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, GENDER ISSUES, EDUCATION, FOOD SECURITY, ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, ETC. FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PURPOSES. THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS PARTNERS CONSIDER THIS EXERCISE AS PREREQUISITE, NOT ONLY TO THE FIRST POST-WAR CENSUS, BUT THE NEXT CENSUS SINCE-1984.

BESIDES, THIS SURVEY WILL ASSIST THE GOVERNMENT TO BEGIN RESTORING ITS DEMOGRAPHIC AND DEVELOPMENTAL DATABASE, WHICH WAS DESTROYED BY THE CIVIL CONFLICT.

THE GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA FURTHER RECOGNISES AND IS APPRECIATIVE OF THE CLOSE COLLABORATION BETWEEN UNFPA AND OTHER UN AGENCIES AND MULTI-BILATERAL AGENCIES (SUCH AS UNICEF, WHO, UNDP AND THE EU). THIS COLLABORATION HAS ENABLED THE OTHER AGENCIES TO PROVIDE COMPLEMENTARY SUPPORT TO OUR GOVERNMENT FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION.

MR. CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, IN SPITE OF OUR EFFORTS AT IMPLEMENTING THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION, THE TASK AHEAD OF US IS HUGE. AS A RESULT OF THE LONG PERIOD OF CIVIL CONFLICT THAT OUR COUNTRY WENT THROUGH. FOR EXAMPLE, WE HAVE A LARGE DISPLACED POPULATION OF ABOUT 1.2 MILLION WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY THAT

WE ARE TRYING TO RESETTLE. ALSO, WE HAVE A BACKLOG OF ABOUT 600,000 YOUNG PEOPLE WHO MISSED OUT ON SCHOOLING DURING THE CONFLICT YEARS. PROVIDING THEM WITH BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES LIKE HEALTH AND EDUCATION IS OUR TOP PRIORITY. THEREFORE, MR. CHAIRMAN, WE ARE USING THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK UNFPA AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR THEIR SUPPORT TO OUR GOVERNMENT SO FAR, AND TO ASSURE YOU THAT YOUR ASSISTANCE IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF LIBERIA. WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO USE THIS OCCASION TO APPEAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY FOR THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND CONTINUED SUPPORT IN UNDERTAKING THESE ENORMOUS CHALLENGES AHEAD. . .

FINALLY, MR. CHAIRMAN, AS WE APPROACH THE NEW MILLENNIUM WITH A CONSOLIDATED REGIME OF PEACE, WE WANT TO ASSURE YOU AND ALL PRESENT THAT LIBERIA WILL CERTAINLY FORGE AHEAD TO JOIN THE REST OF YOU IN FULLY IMPLEMENTING THE ICPD PROGRAMME OF ACTION.

I THANK YOU.