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As written

International Forum for the Operational  
Review and Appraisal of the Implementation  
of the Programme of Action of the  
International Conference on Population and  
Development (ICPD)

**Statement by**

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*UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*

**EXPERT**

**The Hague, February 10, 1999.**

Mr. Chairman,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today to address the Hague Forum on the Review of Progress towards the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, which took place in Cairo, in 1994.

In my capacity of expert member, I am pleased to bring you a message from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, a treaty body of the United Nations system for human rights.

This is, indeed, Mr. Chairman, a message of congratulations for progress achieved and lessons learned, in the broad area of population and development and all its multiple and complex implications, over the last five-year period.

However, first and foremost, it is a message of support and hope for the future: I firmly believe that the outcome of this meeting will assist the international community to effectively address the challenges and constraints which still hinder the full Implementation of the recommendations adopted in Cairo.

Mr. Chairman,

At the very outset, I wish to state that the Committee on the Rights of the Child takes note of and is closely following the activities undertaken by the United Nations system with a view to implement the Cairo Programme of Action, more specifically in relation to human rights treaty bodies and specialized agencies.

As you all are well aware of, the Committee on the Rights of the Child is the monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989.

The Convention constitutes the major legal and political reference for children's rights for virtually all countries around the world, since it has been ratified or acceded to, by 191 States.

It important to stress that the Committee has a mandate to consider reports submitted by States Parties - and it nas already considered 93 reports, since its establishment. In its dialogue with States Parties, the Committee also monitors the implementation of the recommendations adopted by the Cairo Conference in so far as they relate to the whole range of rights enshrined in the Convention, and

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particularly with regard to Article 24, on child's right to health and health services.

Thus, upon the convening of the Hague Forum, the Committee on the Rights of the Child deems it essential to reaffirm the right to health as a fundamental right of the child, in all its dimensions, in the framework of the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In fact, the Convention, in its entirety, provides the basis for promoting and protecting the right to health, growth and development of children. Throughout the Articles of the Convention, the concept of the developmental needs of children is implicit. At the same time, the text recognizes the roles and responsibilities of parents, as set out in Article 18. One could say that the Convention integrates the perceptions of child health and development in a perspective of rights and in the context of the family, the community and society at large.

In the same spirit, it is important to recall the historical relevance of the right to "adequate material and spiritual living conditions for the achievement of a normal and harmonious development of the child", as incorporated in the Declaration of Geneva, adopted by the League of Nations, as early as 1924, and reiterated, thirty-five years

later, in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, proclaimed by the United Nations, in 1959.

Mr. Chairman,

The dynamic relationship existing between the right to health and other children's rights, point out how essential the concepts of indivisibility and interdependence are to the full enjoyment of human rights of all children, including their right to development.

In its dialogue with States Parties, the Committee monitors the implementation of the child's right to health in the light of the General Principles of the Convention, namely non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interests of the child (Article 3), the right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and the right to-participation (Article 12).

The fact is that the holistic nature of the Convention - as well as of its process of implementation and monitoring - provides child's health rights with links to many other rights. The most direct ones are to the right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27) and to the right to education (Article 28).

In considering the wide implications of the implementation by States Parties of the-

child's right to health, the Committee touches upon many crucial issues related in one way or the other to the Cairo Programme of Action.

For reasons of time constraints, it is not possible for me to elaborate on these issues. However, it is important to illustrate - with a few examples - how the Committee expresses its concerns on related policies, programmes and practices which are not in full compliance with the principles and provisions of the Convention:

a) in fact, the Committee has linked concerns about health to discriminatory attitudes and practices in many States. In particular, it has referred to discrimination against children living in poverty and in rural areas, children with disabilities, indigenous children and refugee children. It has highlighted the specific situation of discrimination against the girlchild, underlining the compatibility and complementarity between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Women's Convention;

b) in relation to participatory rights of children, the Committee requires from States Parties information on overall planning, delivery and monitoring of health services relevant to the child and also in relation to treatment of the individual child, to the

child's right to consent and treatment without parental consent;

c) in relation to adolescent morbidity and mortality, the Committee stresses the States Parties obligation to consider the causes, to provide appropriate support for parenting and to protect children from various forms of violence, exploitation and abuse (Articles 19,32-38);

d) the Committee's concerns have focused on a lack of priority given to primary health care, in many countries. In this context, it has highlighted the basic issues of nutrition and clean water, and the dangers of environmental pollution. Discrimination in provision and access to primary health care is often mentioned, particularly affecting children in rural areas and children living in poverty;

e) the Committee has frequently expressed concern at high rates of teenage pregnancy, and has proposed health education and family planning programmes, as well as counselling for teenagers, including peer counselling. It perceives teenage pregnancy as a symptom of other social problems and also notes its impact on educational opportunities. In relation to family planning policy, it has expressed concern at the use of abortion as a method of family planning;

f) the Committee has expressed concern about traditional practices affecting the health of children and recommended action in its Concluding Observations to various States Parties. It has frequently referred to the need to prohibit and to eliminate female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices,, including early marriage and betrothals of children, and forms of child abuse within the family;

g) the Committee has systematically asked States Parties for information on STDs and HIV/AIDS, expressed concern at the spread of the epidemic and its direct and indirect impact on children, urged action and referred to the Recommendations emanating from its General Discussion Day on "Children Living in a World with HIV/AIDS".

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Committee attaches great importance to its presence here today. This is one more strategic occasion to integrate children's rights into the mainstream of United Nations system-wide activities for population and development issues.

Progress has been achieved in many areas. Nonetheless, as we approach a new millenium, there is still a huge task ahead of us. The international community can count on the Committee on the Rights of the Child to do its share. Thank you.