

Statement to The Hague Forum, 8-12 February 1999

As written:

STATEMENT

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at the Hague Forum on Population

Distinguished Mr. Chairman,
Esteemed ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me at the outset to express my sincere gratitude to the hosts and those who organized this Forum for the opportunity to discuss the problems of population and development which are extremely important today.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 gave a strong impetus to the efforts by the international community including Russia to develop and implement comprehensive national and international population policies, and to find the solutions to the demographic problems in the overall context of achieving the long-term goals of sustainable development.

The Russian Federation, as many other countries with economies in transition (ET), continues to face complex problems in developing its population policies. This is to large extent related to specific features of its socio-economic situation.

Since mid-90's we've been witnessing the trend of population decrease in the country. The mortality indicators especially for working-age men remain very high. Low level of births causes below-replacement level of population reproduction. The health of the Russian citizens has deteriorated, especially among youth, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are spreading at a high pace.

Decreasing life expectancy and sharp aging of population and labour resources are causing great concern. The rate of migratory mobility of working force has almost halved. Another problem is posed by a broadening scale of forced migration including labour migration which often takes illegal forms.

In the overall perspective the impact of the Russian demographic crisis on the socio-economic development at the turn of 21st century can mean two things: first, natural loss of economically most important age groups, and, second, expanding share of older working-age persons. Socio-economic and political factors contribute to negative demographic processes which lead to certain reproductive orientation of people.

It is evident that ongoing economic and financial crisis in the country may further deteriorate population situation in Russian.

However, despite these difficulties the Russian Federation in post-Cairo period has been actively developing the ideology and approaches to the state population policy especially aimed at the solution to the problems of family, women and children.

The President of the Russian Federation approved by his decrees a number of important documents, including 'Major Directions of Family Policy', 'Major Directions of the State Social Policy for 2000 on Improving the State of Children in the Russian Federation to (National Action Plan for Children)'. The Government of the Russian Federation has prepared 'Concept of Empowerment of Women in the Russian Federation', 'National Action Plan on Empowerment of Women and Strengthening Their Role in the Society for 2000', 'Action Plan for Improving the State of Children in the Russian Federation' and 'Concept of an Action Programme to Overcome the Demographic Crisis in the Russian Federation'

These documents define the national population policy goals and objectives and strategic actions aimed at the solution of the priority problems in improvement of Russian demographic situation. They also provide for conducive environment for a family and future socio-economic development of our country.

Efforts taken by the Russian Federation for the improvement of health of the nation including creation of a country-wide system of ultra-sound screening of women's reproductive system allowed recently to stabilize infant mortality indicator which is one of the major indicators of the nation's health.

Implementation since 1994 of activities envisaged in 'Family Planning' and 'Safe Maternity' Presidential Programmes resulted in a reduction by one-third of absolute number of abortions in Russia and a 20 per cent decrease in maternal mortality caused by abortions. This was achieved largely due to active involvement of the NGOs and civil society.

A number of educational programmes for adolescents and youth have been launched and are under way now.

At the same time, current Russian situation in the area of population and development requires enhanced attention from the Government. Elaboration of a comprehensive State Strategy was placed at the top of the agenda. It should take into account the whole complex of interrelated factors which would influence the demographic development.

However, we must highlight as a major constraint lack of sufficient public resources to finance necessary social and demographic programmes.

The Government of the Russian Federation considers international cooperation in population issues to be an important activity complementing domestic policies and actions. Mobilization of international support to the Russian reforms related to social and population issues is needed more than ever. We would be counting on further development of collaboration in this area both with traditional bilateral donors and multilateral organizations, in particular funds and programmes of the UN system.

We attach particular importance to our recently started cooperation with UNFPA which we hope can be acquire strategic framework and produce effective projects.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman