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**As WRITTEN**

**Statement by**

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**before the**

**21<sup>st</sup> Special Session of the General Assembly**

**Overall Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Programme of Action  
of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)**

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**United Nations, New York**

**P R E S S                      R E L E A S E**

Mr. President,

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of my delegation, to address this important **twenty-first** special session of the General Assembly devoted to the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and to renew our commitment to exerting greater effort towards achieving the goals and objectives of the ICPD. These objectives include economic development, poverty eradication, sustainable population growth, universal access to comprehensive reproductive health services, reduction in infant and maternal mortality and universal access to primary education, with special attention to closing the gender gap. We strongly hope that this session will adopt the necessary action-oriented recommendations with additional resources in order to speed the implementation of the **ICPD's** Programme of Action.

Mr. President,

After five years of convening the Conference, the international community registered progress through the achievement of various stated outcomes (goals). There is a decline in annual population growth, a reduction in infant and child mortality and people are living longer. However, the world still **faces** many problems and challenges. Severe economic crises, which bring job loss and an increase poverty, and war, ethnic cleansing, conflicts, foreign occupation and natural disasters are obstacles that continue to slow the rate of progress.

In this regard, we would like to draw your attention to the grave situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. Israel, the occupying Power, continues its illegal policies and practice of colonial settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, in violation of international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and United Nations resolutions. The illegal construction of these settlements, including most recently those at **Jabal** Abu Ghneim and Ras Al-Amud, present a serious situation requiring the attention and concern of the international community. The international community must address this situation with the aim of bringing an end to all illegal Israeli settlement activity, including all of its illegal and detrimental ensuing measures such as the transfer of Israeli citizens to the occupied territory, the confiscation of land and the exploitation of natural resources, including water. All of this clearly reflects a policy of illegal expansion and annexation.

Mr. President,

The situation of the 3.5 millions Palestine refugees has deteriorated in **recent** years. Of the total Palestinian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, more than 15.9% reside in refugee camps. The Palestine refugees in the occupied territory as well as those throughout the region continue to face severe **socio-economic** hardships, including very high unemployment, a decline in household income, an overburdened infrastructure and deplorable living conditions.

In this important forum, we wish to reaffirm that, in accordance with international law, the Palestinian refugees, like any other refugees, have natural established rights to return to their homes and properties or to compensation for those who choose not to return. Therefore, the international community should continue to assist them until a definitive solution to their problem is reached through the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions. Another problem the Palestinian people continue to face is displacement. The rights of Palestine refugees, however, should not be confused with the right of displaced persons to return to the territory occupied by Israel since 1967.

The international community should strongly reaffirm the call in the Programme of Action that population distribution policies should be consistent with such international instruments as the 1949

Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian in Times of War, including Article 49. Moreover, it should **reaffirm** the call in the Programme of Action for countries to address the causes of migration and displacement, including armed conflict and colonial illegal settlements, and establish the necessary mechanisms to protect and assist displaced persons, including compensation for damages and the right to return to their homes and property.

Mr. President,

Palestine has undertaken a variety of measures to enhance activities in the field of population and development. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics was established specifically to monitor demographic changes within the Palestinian population, to conduct population and housing censuses, and to identify indicators for monitoring progress in implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

With regard to international concerns regarding health care, the Palestinian National Authority has given special attention to the issue of health, in particular reproductive health. Although our **official** population policy has not yet been formulated, **the** Palestinian health plan is being developed in accordance with the principles and objectives of the ICPD Programme of Action. Promoting reproductive health, including women's health, is the central theme of the Palestinian health plan, which aims to:

- Reduce maternal mortality and high-risk pregnancy by 50%;
- Integrate reproductive health/family planning services and counseling at the primary and secondary health care level;
- Increase contraceptive prevalence by 25%;
- Increase the proportion of women receiving postnatal care;
- Introduce screening in nearly 50% of health facilities for early detection of breast and cervical cancer;
- Increase awareness of the population on reproductive health issues through mass media and other communication channels.

Gender concerns have also been integral in the development of the Palestinian Health Plan. A separate Gender Planning Unit was established in the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. Moreover, the data of **the** 1997 Palestinian census was analyzed by gender to provide the basis for accurate assessment of gender issues and to incorporate gender concerns into development plans.

Mr. President,

I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the international community for their support and assistance to the Palestinian people. In particular, I would like to convey our appreciation to the United Nations Population Fund (**UNFPA**) for their role in supporting the Palestinian National Authority and enabling it to implement the ICPD Programme of Action, as well as other donor countries, for their significant support. We are confident that the establishment of cooperative relationships and partnerships such as these between the Palestinian Authority and relevant United Nations bodies and **NGOs** will bring about concrete results in the improvement of the situation of the Palestinian people in the important fields of population and development. Thank you, Mr. President.