

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, September 29, 1994

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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### ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

#### INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION

**Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration):** Madam Speaker, I welcome this morning the opportunity to report to my federal colleagues of this House on the international conference on population and development held in Cairo earlier this month, at which I had the privilege of being the leader of the Canadian delegation.

As head of that delegation I would like to express the government's sincere thanks to the very able Canadian negotiators who piloted through the program of action on Canada's behalf, a group of dedicated public servants who served our country with distinction.

I should also mention the work done by a multiplicity of support staff that worked long and hard from morning to evening in those discussions. Many times we forget that those are the officials who worked for several years leading up to this conference and sometimes at the conference it is the heads of the states or the leaders of the delegations who get the limelight or the credit as well as the blame when perhaps things do not go per course. I think it is important for all of us to signal to them our appreciation for the kind of public service they have rendered on our behalf.

Canada not only played a useful role as one of the many countries assembled in Cairo, but I would suggest Canada played a tremendous facilitating role. Canada was very much a builder of bridges among different countries that perhaps had different views and yes, some very hard concerns about certain aspects of the draft action plan.

• (1005)

Canada did not try to seek the limelight and speak in the public arena every day but there was a lot of behind the scenes

work in trying to foster those rapports, in trying to keep channels open and also being respectful of the different opinions, whether they be political, whether they be cultural or whether they be religious. In terms of the Holy See, I think Canada among the western countries had probably one of the better pipelines that remained open with the Holy See and others. That is the kind of internationalism that Canada has made a very proud tradition for herself.

It was a truly rewarding experience as a participant to see such a remarkable degree of consensus on sensitive and controversial issues that strike at the very heart of the human condition.

[Translation]

There were over 180 delegations from far and wide representing various political systems, cultures and religions. They agreed on a comprehensive program of action.

[English]

As an international blueprint for change the program of action represents a springboard for advancement on both population and development. It brings together the approaches of the past which focused on demographics and development. In the seventies in Bucharest the answer was development. It was seen as the panacea in terms of trying to deal with both population on the one hand and between the nations that do the consumption. Yet that did not work.

In the eighties the whole question was the demographics, somehow arbitrary numbers brought down from thin air and probably forced upon people and nations the globe over. That did not work either.

In the 1990s as a result of Cairo we have seen the convergence of both family planning and development, both for the individual as well as for that country. It think it is through the convergence of those two forces that hopefully we will be able to unlock a number of problematic doors that have faced the international community.

Cairo also recognized the vital role of women in achieving social and economic goals. We mentioned in our speech from the platform, as Mahatma Gandhi once said, when you educate a man you educate an individual; when you educate a woman you educate an entire community and family. I think there is something to that. Some people get worried when we say empowerment of women.