



STATEMENT

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE SERGIO MARCHI,
MINISTER OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION
AND HEAD OF CANADA'S DELEGATION,
TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

CAIRO, Egypt
September 6, 1994

Mr. President, distinguished delegates:

In Canada's capital city of Ottawa, where I now live and work, there is something called the "Earth Clock." Located in the entrance of the building containing the International Development Research Centre, it looks a lot like an ordinary clock as it relentlessly ticks away.

But there is a difference.

It links the planet's population to the mother earth from which all of us draw life. And this clock graphically illustrates the challenge that has drawn each of us to this conference in Cairo. Because with each minute the clock marks an increase of 180 people and a decrease of 20 acres around the globe.

Population and Sustainable Development

In Cairo, we have taken an important, and historic, step by agreeing that population is not just about numbers and fertility levels. It's also about extreme poverty, mass illiteracy, the death of mothers at childbirth, coupled with unconscionable consumption habits in the developed countries. These problems defy simple solutions.

The Draft Program of Action — which Canada supports — lays out the challenges before us. And after arduous negotiation we are agreed on 90 per cent of the document. So I take heart that this conference, like others before it, is helping us to move forward as a human family, to a better quality of life.

We look back on interrelated gatherings — the Children's Summit, the Earth Summit, the Human Rights Conference — and measure real progress. But the clock is still ticking. . . . What can we do to slow it down?

Canada's approach is straightforward. We want to nurture healthy societies where every man, woman and child can reach their potential.

I would like to talk about five aspects of population and development that Canadians feel are especially important:

- empowering women;
- the environment;
- partnership on a multilateral basis;
- reproductive health issues; and
- migration issues.

Empowering Women

As Mahatma Gandhi once said: "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. If you educate a woman, you educate the whole family." By empowering women I mean recognition of these fundamental rights:

- the right to access to employment;
- the right to health care and education;
- the right to determine how many children they will bear; and
- the right to participate fully in decisions that affect their lives.

These are fundamental human rights. They also strengthen the family as the wellspring of civilized society. By supporting women, we open the door to a better quality of life for all family members. In fact, by supporting women, we empower the whole family.

The Environment

The question on the environment is not who owns the problem, but who will take up the solutions? It is impossible to imagine how the human family will survive the 21st century unless both runaway consumption in the North as well as population growth and sustainable economic growth in the South are addressed.

Global problems, such as population, cannot be faced by governments alone.

Partnership and Multilateralism

The problems we face at this conference are neither created nor solved in isolation. We are encouraged that the Draft Program recognizes the importance of partnerships between those who heal and those who teach.

Partnerships, including those with NGOs [non-governmental organizations], satisfy the need to act locally, but it is through international co-operation that we are able to act globally. For Canadians, partnership on the international stage is best expressed through the practice of multilateralism, through participation in institutions like the United Nations, the Commonwealth, la Francophonie. It is only through multilateral partnership that we will be able to resolve the great challenges of our time.

Reproductive Health Issues

As members of the international community, we have a shared responsibility to face certain realities and find the courage to act. These realities include:

- tragically high rates of maternal death, much of it resulting from unsafe abortion;
- the continued and alarming spread of AIDS;
- teenage pregnancy, with the added health risk it carries for mother and child; and
- high infant mortality rates.

These are drastic problems that require urgent action.

We are left with serious challenges, especially in the area of reproductive health and reproductive rights. The Canadian view, which finds its expression in the Program of Action, is that reproductive health is a basic human right. This is already stated implicitly in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other UN instruments to which most of us are signatories. We also agree that coercion and arbitrary demographic targets have no place in today's world. Not only are they a flagrant violation of human rights, they are not sustainable.

We share the Program's view that development alone will not be enough to curb population. It must go hand-in-hand with the recognition and support of the rights of women, particularly those rights that are linked to health and family planning. The protection of maternal and child health — which lies at the core of what we are discussing here — is not just an issue for developing countries. Recently, for example, my government launched a prenatal nutrition program to help poor women give birth to healthier babies. This is an area where we all have to work harder.

So, too, we must work to ensure that men and women have access to a broad range of voluntary and culturally sensitive family planning services. On this point, let me be clear: Canada does not promote abortion as a method of family planning. Recognizing that this remains a particularly sensitive issue, we would support language in the Program of Action that allows states to regulate or not — as they see fit — services related to abortion. It would not be correct, however, to interpret our support as an attempt to create an international right to abortion.

The hard truth is that thousands of women die annually from unsafe abortion. Thousands more of our children will perish for

want of simple education and responsible planning. We must act now to address this serious public health concern. We believe that family planning — along with a full range of reproductive and primary health care services — is the key to reducing a woman's recourse to abortion, not just for reasons of health, but out of respect for the human condition.

This is not, after all, a conference about abortion; it is about caring; it is about real, sustainable solutions for those in gravest need.

Migration Issues

If much has been said — in the media and in the corridors here — about reproductive rights, we have heard very little about involuntary migration as a growing threat to global human security.

Canada views the migration chapter as a major accomplishment, especially for the balance it achieves:

- between compassion and control;
- between migration and the right to live in your homeland; and
- between the responsibility of the receiving state and the newcomer.

Yet, the chapter is not complacent. It describes clearly the three main challenges still facing us: prevention, protection and integration.

Too many of our fellow human beings are forced to leave their homes by a lack of economic opportunity, environmental degradation, war, famine and human rights abuses. The Program of Action makes it clear that countries must work together to reduce involuntary migration by addressing its root causes — one of which is overpopulation.

One hundred million people are on the move, worldwide. Twenty-three million of these, mostly women and young children, are refugees. What will become of them?

Why the ominous silence? Let us discuss these matters openly. We will have to harness all the tools available to us — from open markets, to foreign investment, to conflict prevention to progress on human rights — to ensure that migration is always a matter of choice and not desperation.

The second challenge facing us is protection. Most refugee movements will continue to be among countries in the developing

world. The generosity of these countries in providing refuge to their neighbours has been remarkable — and the world community must assist them in a similar spirit of co-operation and solidarity.

These refugee movements will continue to place great strains on the institution of asylum — and we will have to join hands to strengthen and adapt that institution to meet current realities.

The third great challenge is that of making newcomers feel welcome in our societies — the challenge of integration. This is a challenge that begins at home. It involves a mutual respect of values and traditions on the part of both newcomers and receiving states.

No country can meet all of these challenges alone. This is not a North-South or East-West problem. It is a global challenge — yet institutional and policy frameworks are light-years behind our current migration challenges.

We react to emergencies only — and then, often too late and defensively. I call on each of us to act now. We must make progress on migration issues if we are to put in place the foundation that will move us beyond the frustrations of the status quo.

Follow-up

This week, the eyes of the world are on Cairo. But what will happen when we go home? Will it be back to business as usual?

All of us know that we will be judged by our actions and our achievements, not by our noble words. I do recognize that each of us has national constraints which we must balance against the commitments made here.

Canada, for example, is in the midst of reviewing our foreign and migration policy. This has involved intensive consultation with our citizens. They are questioning whether we are wisely spending our development dollars. We are also asking the same questions to UN agencies and our NGO partners. Is our spending strategic? Are we truly doing all we can to address basic human needs?

Canadians tell us we should continue to put our foreign aid where it will do the most good — on basic human needs, like immunization, nutrition, primary health care, including family planning, and education, especially education for all our daughters. And this is what we will do.

Conclusion

The Draft Program is a glimpse 20 years into the future, of accomplishments made and challenges met. We know this is not enough, so let's ensure that we check on our progress in implementing it. Our work here is a promise to our children that we will do more than talk. We will act:

- by cutting maternal mortality rates in half;
- by halting the spread of AIDS;
- by reducing infant mortality rates; and
- by making reproductive health a universal right.

We will also have slowed down the relentless ticking of the Earth Clock.

A quarter-century ago Nobel Peace laureate Lester Pearson, a man who once led my country, called on world leaders to "cultivate international ideals, develop international policies, strengthen international institutions . . . so that peace and progress can be made secure" in the human family.

Today in Cairo I carry forward his challenge. We must, because every generation has a moral obligation to leave to its children a safer, healthier world than the one it inherited.

This is our obligation. Today, it is our opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. President.