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Statement of

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Good afternoon esteemed Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be addressing a group such as yours here in the homeland of Alfred Sauvy, the great demographer who made France the world's premier centre for the scientific study of population. We know Sauvy well in the United Nations. Not only did he train a number of outstanding students who went on to have distinguished careers at the United Nations Population Division, his great work was recognized, posthumously, with the United Nations Population Award in 1990. His heritage is an integral part of the United Nations.

I am greatly encouraged that interest in population here in France is moving outside the academic to the political and civil spheres. While France has been a supporter of international population assistance, its support has lagged behind that of many other European nations. That may now be changing. Our meeting here today is evidence of a new appreciation of population in France. In addition, the letter of a distinguished senator and former minister Jacques Legendre caused Minister of Foreign Affairs Alain Juppé to comment publicly on France's level of support for international population programmes. And, two deputies, Roselyne Bachelot and Daniel Garrigue, questioned the Minister of Cooperation on the Government's support for population programmes in 1995. These activities are sensitizing French parliamentarians to the need for more support for population programmes. "Population et Equilibre", under the strong leadership of Madame Tisson and Michel Solomon, has done a superb job of creating new interest in this subject.

The widespread publicity garnered by the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo last year also helped bring the issue to the forefront. Women everywhere felt they had been energized by the Conference. Minister Simone Veil was quoted in newspapers throughout Europe as saying that after the ICPD she felt *"real solidarity amongst women."*

Moreover, population is increasingly seen as an important global problem by parliamentarians not only in France but throughout Europe and the world at large. I hope all of you have seen the positive response to the questionnaire on population sent by Population et Equilibre to the members of the European Parliament. While this was not a scientific poll, it clearly indicates the high level of awareness and concern that parliamentarians have about global population issues.

Support for population programmes and policies is an urgent global priority, today more than ever. This was acknowledged by 180 countries last September when they overwhelmingly endorsed the idea that population and development are inseparable, and supported a new strategy focusing on individuals' needs and human rights rather than on demographic targets. In approving the new strategy, the international community has acknowledged that investing in people, in their health and education, is the key to sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

In one of the strongest statements of its kind in a United Nations document, the Programme of Action adopted in Cairo clearly stated that giving women the tools and means to manage their lives was both an important end in itself and a key element of sustainable development.

In the aftermath of the Cairo Conference, many countries are focusing their attention on the recommendations made in the Programme of Action, particularly the emphasis on promoting gender equality, the advancement of women, and on ensuring that individual women and men have access to a full range of quality reproductive health services. The experiences of population programmes around the world attest to the soundness of this approach: given choices, women will make decisions that are beneficial to their own interest, and to the interest of their families. This, in turn, will help further the economic and social goals of their society.

The nations of the world agreed in Cairo that continuing economic progress depends on success in social development - in areas such as education, health and the advancement of women. The Cairo consensus recognized that poverty will not be defeated by economic means alone. The basis for an attack on poverty must be built by the people themselves: to be successful they need some basic equipment, including universal access to health care and education, and equality between women and men, girls and boys.

The United Nations estimates that 1.3 billion people - one in every five on Earth - live in debilitating poverty. Of the world's 1.3 billion poor, women make up the majority - estimates range as high as 70 per cent of the total. ICPD delegates recognized that poverty is the most formidable enemy of choice. Better health and education, and freedom to plan their family's future, will widen women's economic choices: but it will also liberate their minds and spirits. As the leader of the Zimbabwe delegation put it, it will endow women not only with the power to fight, but with the power to decide. That power of decision alone will ensure many changes in the world.

Following the Cairo Conference, our task now, both collectively and individually, is to ensure that the optimism which has emerged from the process and which the Programme of Action reflects is turned into tangible benefits for people everywhere.

Energetic and committed implementation of the Programme of Action over the next 20 years will bring women at last into the mainstream of development and will do a number of other things:

- *it will protect women's health, promote their education, and encourage and reward their economic contributions;

- *it will help ensure that every pregnancy is intended, and every child is a wanted child;

- *it will help protect women from the results of unsafe abortion;

- *it will help protect the health of adolescents, and encourage responsible behaviour;

- *it will help combat the spread of HIV/AIDS;

- *it will promote education for all and help to close the gender gap in education;

- *it will help protect and promote the integrity of the family.

Energetic implementation of the Programme adopted in Cairo will contribute to slower and more balanced population growth; to the ending of poverty; and to economic development compatible with the demands of sustainability.

Of particular importance in Cairo was the agreement by all countries, developed and developing alike, on the level of resources that will be required to implement the Programme of Action's call for universal access by 2015 to a comprehensive package of reproductive health care services, encompassing family planning, safe motherhood, prevention of sexually

transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDs, and related programmes.

It was estimated that in developing countries and those with economies in transition, the package will cost \$US17 billion per year in the year 2000 - about three times what is being spent today -- and \$21.7 billion in 2015. Developing countries themselves are expected to be able to provide two thirds of the necessary funds; it was agreed that about one third, or around \$5.7 billion in the year 2000 and \$7.2 billion in 2015 will have to come from international donors.

In light of this agreement, a number of industrialized countries have already indicated that they will increase their support of population and reproductive health programmes. It is my great hope that France too, will strengthen its contributions. In addition to greater support for multilateral programmes like UNFPA's, more bilateral assistance is needed in those countries where France provides significant support for development activities such as in Africa. In recent years African Governments have recognized that rapid population growth and urbanization hamper social and economic development. They need more support to implement the population programmes that most of them have now initiated. Also crucial is greater support for programmes implemented by non-governmental organizations: the Cairo Programme of Action stresses the need for broad and effective partnership between governments and non-governmental organizations in formulating, implementing and monitoring population and development programmes.

It is also of the utmost importance that France, with its great tradition in population studies and analysis, provide leadership within the European Union to promote Union policies in support of the decisions taken in Cairo.

The Cairo Conference was not an isolated event. The Programme of Action drew on the recommendations of the World Summit for Children, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the World Conference on Human Rights among others. The language of Cairo has been endorsed by the draft document of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen which opened yesterday and will be part of the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing this September. Helping women to help themselves as a basic element of sustainable development is accepted in these Conferences as part of an ongoing process to set the social and economic agenda for the next century.

Legislators and other members of groups such as yourselves who already recognize the importance of supporting efforts to advance women and strengthen population and reproductive health programmes as a strategy to help end poverty will be instrumental in bringing about an increased national commitment to these efforts. Our long-standing cooperation with Parliamentarians, both individually and through various parliamentary organizations, reflects the importance that we attach to the crucial role that you as a group, must play to ensure the success of population programmes. Your help will be especially vital in mobilizing public support for the goals of the Cairo Conference and in increasing resource allocations to population programmes and related social sectors such as education and primary health care.

The Cairo Programme of Action, to be more than a paper promise, needs to be made your programme of action here in France. Women the world over look to you to give them the freedom to decide the course of their lives. Let us give them that freedom and together make the world a better place for our children and our descendants.