

Speeches

Permanent Mission Of Barbados to The United Nations

Statement by Hon. Billie A. Miller, M.P. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados to the 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

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Mr. President

In the view of the Barbados Government, our task here at this Special Session on the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development is to chart the way forward in a new and dynamic global environment. The task is indeed a difficult one but not an impossible one.

As we look back on five years of implementing the Cairo ICPD Programme of Action, we observe that on a worldwide scale there has been much progress in policy and programme design, in legislative and institutional frameworks, and, to varying degrees, increased partnership and collaboration among governments, United Nations agencies, NGOs and civil society. Still there remain many challenges.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has emerged as a major challenge that seriously threatens recent ICPD achievements. Developed and developing country records show the disastrous toll inflicted by the epidemic, not only with respect to mortality, but also to morbidity. In the hardest hit countries, life expectancy at birth is currently estimated at 47 years, and one quarter of the adult population is infected. The number of children orphaned by AIDS is expected to increase to 40 million by the year 2010.

The social and economic losses due to AIDS are reversing hard-won-development gains. Its destructive forces pose a fatal threat to men and women alike during their productive years, and in the case of women, during their reproductive years especially. There is a serious need to review the objectives and actions set out at Cairo, and to evaluate new goals to arrest the spread of AIDS. In this respect the international community must strengthen its actions, in order to meet key strategic goals in the crisis of HIV/AIDS as well as in national health and reproductive health services.

Mr. President,

Adolescent reproductive health remain a major challenge in the implementation of the Cairo ICPD Programme of Action. In 1994, delegates reached a high degree of consensus on issues relating to sexual and reproductive health and the well being of young people – who today constitute 30 per cent of the world's population. The Programme of Action was specific in outlining the actions required to promote responsible and healthy reproductive and sexual behaviour, and to substantially reduce all adolescent pregnancies.

Then as it does now, the Programme of Action recognised that the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents is closely entwined with other societal problems and unmet needs. In order to understand them, we must understand their antecedents and take into consideration the familial, social, cultural and economic aspects of their environment. We can be encouraged that UNFPA reports which indicate that considerable progress has been achieved in this respect. Yet, the international community must continue to build on the legal foundations established in the areas of human rights of women and adolescents, as recognised by the United Nations. In addition it must be recognised that education is the key to understanding the issues associated with adolescent reproductive health. It is also important that young people are involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of adolescent health programmes.

Mr. President,

During the 1980's the Inter-American Parliamentary Group on Population and Development sponsored a highly successful series of Youth Parliaments throughout the Caribbean. These parliaments gave young people an opportunity to research and express their views on the causes and consequences of decisions which related to their sexual and reproductive behaviour. One of the positive spin-offs of the exercise, particularly in the case of Barbados, was the development of peer counseling which is being actively pursued by the Barbados Family Planning Association.

This model of using young people as advocates to communicate critical messages concerning their sexual and reproductive health is arguably one of the Barbados Family Planning Association's most successful initiatives in the past ten years.

Mr. President,

We cannot speak to issues of population and development without reference to the phenomenon of population ageing which presents new challenges to our nations particularly in the area of sustained economic growth. The Programme of Action has provided us with key proposals for future action which need to be implemented at both the national and international level. In order to meet the challenge of population ageing we will have to comprehensively address the legal, fiscal, financial and labour implications of ageing as they relate to pensions, social benefits, social services and long-term health care problems. There must be support for senior citizens which will allow them to play a more productive role in the labour market and in society as a whole.

In this regard the lessons learned in this regard by the developed countries, which have already responded to this challenge, can be passed on to the developing countries.

Mr. President,

Barbados is fully aware of and actively engaged in the process of interdependence which links poverty, economic development and the environment. A small island developing country with limited financial resources, Barbados has embarked on a programme of social transformation intended to embrace the most disadvantaged in the society. As part of the Government's institutional restructuring a new Ministry, the Ministry of Social Transformation, has been established to work for the eradication of poverty and reform of the social sector to meet the challenges of the new Millennium. Greater emphasis is being placed on ensuring the right of every citizen to a decent quality of life.

Barbados remains committed to the goals of the ICPD Programme of Action and has cooperated at the national as well as the regional level to further its implementation. In addressing male responsibility and participation, the government of Barbados has insightfully elevated its Bureau of Women's Affairs to a Bureau of Gender Affairs with the intention of promoting gender equity and equality, and to encourage and enable men as well to take responsibility for their sexual and

reproductive behavior and their social and family roles.

The post-ICPD years have witnessed a general increase in activities in the Caribbean region, and in Barbados, in particular, focusing on young people and organizations working with the youth. These activities culminated with UNFPA Caribbean Youth Summit in 1998 on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights. The Summit produced a Caribbean Regional Declaration and a Regional Plan which called for the creation of reproductive health and social services for youth which are founded on the ICPD Programme of Action.

Mr. President,

Inadequate resources for implementing the Cairo Programme remain a burning issue. The Programme of Action estimated that the implementation of its population and reproductive health component would cost 17 billion US dollars by the year 2000, with two-thirds coming from national resources and one-third from the donor community. Since the first enthusiastic flow of financial aid, donor fatigue has set in and the flow has ebbed.

This development is a serious setback, particularly since the donor community plays an important role in financing population programmes in developing countries. We live in an interdependent world. All countries should therefore strive to meet the committed target for assistance, in order to re-energize the implementation of ICPD. In our view, the United Nations Population and Development Fund has met the challenge of the Cairo Programme with great resolve and effectiveness. We would urge that increased resources should be made available to UNFPA which bears major responsibility at the multilateral level for follow-up and implementation.

Life is about choices and change. As agents of change we have the tremendous opportunity and potential to make and influence the choices which will augur a better quality of life for all as we approach the twenty-first century.

Mr. President,

We are not expected to complete the task but neither are we at liberty to abstain from it. I thank you.