



LD/gf
16 May 1994
E94-52

**INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE POPULATION
COMMISSION OF THE ORGANIZATION OF
AFRICAN UNITY**

OPENING STATEMENT

Layashi YAKER
United Nations Under-Secretary-General,
Executive Secretary of the
Economic Commission for Africa

Addis Ababa, 16 May 1994

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to thank my brother Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim and the organizers of the present meeting for the honour of inviting me to take the floor on this occasion.

The principle behind the establishment of this Population Commission is itself praiseworthy and important for Africa. This positive initiative enables the creation of an interface and an instrument promoting dialogue between specialists and political leaders, dialogue which in the past was too often left to the discretion of events. The Population Commission will serve, we hope, as the framework for reflection and exchanges on the very complex issues of the relation between population and development.

This initiative already has the support of the last session of the Conference of Ministers of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The latter hoped that your Commission is called the African Population Commission particularly for drawing on the available expertise of the ECA secretariat, its experience and its commitment to searching for solutions to the socio-economic problems of Africa.

Although the continental diversity among regions and within of countries is such that any general, overall conclusion would be dangerous when examining the socio economic problems currently confronting African countries, it must be recognized that the impact of the population factor has often been negative and has aggravated the acuteness of the crisis and rendered solutions more difficult. Furthermore, most African countries today recognize, in their various

economic and social development plans, that the situation created by rapid population growth and poor distribution give rise to important needs in various sectors, needs which are increasingly difficult to face.

The secretariat of the ECA has played a major role acknowledged internationally in raising the awareness of African countries about the importance of demographic factors in the development process, at a time when the very word population was itself often taboo in the discussions held by the highest authorities. This pioneer work was realized and through the multiple activities of the ECA, including establishment and management with the support of UNFPA, of African institutions, recognized today as centres of quality, such as the Institute for Demographic Training and Research (IFORD), at Yaounde, Cameroon, and the Regional Institute for Population Studies at Accra in Ghana. I wish to express appreciation for the competence and commitment of their directors and their staffs.

The effort to raise the awareness of member States was done in three phases. First, it was necessary to give priority to collection of the necessary data for socio-economic planning. Thus, most African countries have the data required, thanks specially to the Programme for African Censuses which was financed by UNFPA. During the second phase, stress was placed on data analysis and promotion of suitable population policies. The adoption by African Governments of the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action on Population in 1984 and the Dakar/Ngor Declaration on Population, Family and Sustainable Development in 1992 illustrate well the successes recorded in this area. The current phase is basically devoted to the search for

assistance to give to member States for implementation of the relevant recommendations contained in the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action and in the Dakar/Ngor Declaration.

It is in this regard that the ECA recently organized the inaugural session of the Follow-up Committee for implementing the recommendations of the third African Conference on Population. Lack of resources is a problem both in the African countries and for the secretariat. The Committee has adopted rules and procedures as well as its programme of work for the next five years. The major tasks assigned to the ECA within the programme of work particularly include assistance to African countries in their preparations for the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, the biannual meetings of the Follow-up Committee, the annual meetings of the Working Group, a reference document for member States on implementation of the Dakar/Ngor Declaration and assessment of the progress achieved in implementing the Declaration.

ECA activities in the area of population are also characterized by numerous consulting services which the secretariat continues to provide to member States. As you know ECA has graciously made available to member States regional advisors specialized in data processing statistics and demographic analysis, operating as a part of regional support teams from the UNFPA offices based at Addis Ababa, Dakar and Harare. Almost all African countries have benefited at one time or another from these highly appreciated ECA services.

The secretariat has also attentively followed the trends in the perceptions of member States on such major demographic phenomena as

fertility, mortality, population growth, population distribution, migrations etc. Thus, the regular surveys carried out by the United Nations General Secretariat in member States and in which we have taken part, enable the ECA to update continually the databases on which it relies for definition and follow-up of population policies and programmes proposed to member States.

With regard to such socio-economic problems of the continent as external debt, financial resource flows at deteriorating exchange rates, the energy crisis and environmental degradation, the ECA always favours a regional approach in the search for solutions to these problems. This is why it has played a leading role in formulation of the Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos, the United Nations Programme for Economic Recovery and Development of Africa, the new Programme for the Economic Development of Africa, the Khartoum Declaration and the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community, to name only a few.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, the Population Commission which you propose to set up will benefit from the extensive experience acquired by the ECA with which we hope it will cooperate closely. It will also benefit from the close collaboration which exists between the ECA, OAU and ADB through the joint ECA/OAU/ADB secretariat.

This cooperation was established in an exemplary manner within the framework of joint preparation and organization of the second and third African Conferences on Population which took place at Arusha,

Tanzania in 1984 and at Dakar, Senegal in 1992. It has been followed-up within the context of the design and the establishment of the Population Commission with the effective participation of the ECA in the preparations and in the sessions of the preparatory meeting of experts. Such cooperation recently came into play again on the occasion of the third meeting of the Preparatory Committee of the International Conference on Population and Development held in New York in April 1994, during which the two secretariats jointly assisted the group of African experts in negotiating the substance of the draft final document.

I can assure you already that this cooperation is going to be continued and strengthened within the framework of the implementation and follow-up of the biennial programme of work of the Population Commission which you will adopt during your sessions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The creation of an African Commission on Population is justified by the complex nature of the continent's problems at a time when awareness raising on population issues has become generalized. It is also my pleasure to note that you will review, among other items on your agenda, the population problems facing the continent.

Without jumping to the conclusions and political directions which you will recommend, allow me to hope that your deliberations will lead to sustainable solutions for supplying the responsible leaders with formulated and detailed responses to all aspects of problems encountered.

Indeed, you already know that member States have set ambitious objectives in the Dakar/Ngor Declaration, objectives whose achievement require the contribution of all development partners.

For the first time in a document of this type, quantitative objectives were announced. From this perspective, reduced population growth should be a major objective of population policies. The population growth rate which is today on the order of 3 per cent annually has to be lowered by the year 2000 to 2.5 per cent and to 2 per cent by 2010. Achievement of this objective requires a significant increase in the contraceptive prevalence rate. The latter should be raised to 20 per cent by the year 2000 and to 40 per cent by 2010. The Dakar/Ngor Declaration on the other hand, sets a number of quantitative objectives in terms of mortality reduction by the year 2000. From this perspective, life expectancy at birth region-wide should be raised to 55 years at least; infant mortality rate should be reduced to at least 50 per thousand and the childhood mortality rate to 70 or less per thousand. Finally, the maternal mortality rate should be halved. Attainment of this latter objective is conditioned by establishment and development of quality family planning services accessible to all.

Certainly, member-State Governments are committed to implementing the recommendations contained in the Declaration and, drawing lessons from past experience, have taken the precaution of instituting a follow-up mechanism officially installed by the Executive Secretary of the ECA. I hope that this commitment will be strong and sustained by clear, transparent policies and appropriate activities.

However, harmonization of the activities of your Commission with those of the Follow-up Committee for implementation of the Declaration must be ensured for rationalization of efforts and increased chances of attaining the objectives set by African Governments.

I wish you great success in your work and I thank you for your attention.