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**STATEMENT OF H.E. DR. SALIM A. SALIM,
OAU SECRETARY GENERAL,
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE INAUGURAL
MEETING OF THE OAU POPULATION COMMISSION,
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 16 MAY 1994**

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Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellency, The Representative of the Transitional Government
of Ethiopia,
H.E Layashi Yaker, ECA Executive Secretary,
Representative of the President of ADB,
Representative of the Executive Secretary of UNFPA, Mr. Lamine
N'Diaye,
Your Excellencies the Ambassadors,
Distinguished Participants.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honour to welcome you all to this
important occasion of the Inaugural Meeting of the OAU Population
Commission.

For the first time, African countries have come together to
establish a body which aims at coordinating various activities
concerning population and development in Africa. At the present
time, there are many different types of activities carried out by
African Governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-
governmental organizations in the field of population. There is no
doubt that these activities have contributed immensely to policies,
to the sensitization of our people on the importance of the
population factor in our development efforts. However, because of
the multiplicity of the actors in the population field, as well as
the numerous programmes in which they are involved, there are bound
to be problems of concentrating on particular areas of activity
thereby duplicating efforts while neglecting of other equally
important fields of activity. Moreover, there is need for Africa to
establish a sense of direction in the field of population so that
we can speak with a common voice in international fora. For these

reasons, we need to establish a Population Commission whose main function is to coordinate and harmonize the various population activities in the continent.

Mr Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,

The establishment of this Commission is long overdue. Africa should have established a population commission long ago, as have other regions of the world. Apart from its coordinating functions, the Population Commission will also provide a forum where Africans can update their knowledge on new developments in the population field as well as exchange views on their experiences in this area. Since, Africa is the last continent to venture into the field of population, it has a lot of catching-up to do. It is expected that the Commission will provide the necessary inspiration and impetus for this objective.

Mr Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,

There are historical reasons for this late start. Until fairly recently, most African governments did not view rapid population growth as a matter for concern. Many argued in favour of more rapid population growth which they believed would provide an increased number of inhabitants to serve as factors of production and consumption, that is, to strengthen the country's ability to produce more and to increase aggregate demand. They point out that the problem lies in small but very intensively populated rural and urban areas. Despite this viewpoint, it is important to point out that the population problem does not lie solely in the question of density. The critical issue in the discussion of population variable in development is the improvement of the quality of life

of the people. This fact is being appreciated by an increasing number of African countries which, during the past ten years or so, have realised that their resources cannot sustain the quality of life of the rapidly expanding population.

Mr Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,

The African demographic data provide the reason for the recent interest of African countries in the field of population. A major phenomenon of the African population is its rapid growth in this century. In 1900, the population was estimated at 120 million. In 1920, it jumped to 136 million and by 1950, it rose to 222 million. Twenty years later, in 1970, it reached 363 million; in another 20 years, in 1990, it was 640 million. At present, it is estimated at 682 million. Thus, Africa has the fastest growing population in the world. Currently, the region's average annual rate of natural increase is 3.1 per cent. At such a rate, Africa's population will reach approximately 1 billion by the year 2005. The fertility rate has remained high because the average number of births per woman remains exceptionally high at more than six.

By late 1984, a consensus had emerged in favour of limiting population growth, as evidenced by most African governments' endorsement of the conclusions of the UN International Population Conference held in Mexico in 1984. Infact, by 1990, about three-quarters of all African countries had family-planning programmes, and some have even set targets for population growth. Fertility seems to be declining in the small number of states which have established family planning.

Despite the desire to do so, stemming rapid population growth in Africa is bound to be difficult because of social as well as economic factors. Since most Africans live in rural areas on farms,

they require large numbers of helping hands to do farm work. The cheapest way of obtaining such assistance is for a farmer to have more children. In addition, since infant mortality rate is so high, rural families tend to want, and to actively have, more babies. Furthermore, since African countries do not have organized-old age support schemes, children are often viewed as potential providers of support for the elderly. Finally, according to a recent study by the World Bank, modern contraceptive methods are used by only about 5% of couples in sub-Saharan Africa, implying that 95% of the population do not use the modern contraceptive means.

Another important feature of the African population is that the proportion of youth is very high, indicating that Africa is a youthful continent. According to UN estimates, at least 45 percent of the population is under age 15 in most African countries. This large proportion of children creates a built-in momentum for future population growth. In fact, the rapidly increasing number of youth constitutes one of the single most compelling challenges for Africa. The UN estimates that in 1960 there were 69 million young African people between the ages of 10 and 24. By 1985, that number had more than doubled to nearly 141 million. By the year 2000, it is projected to increase another 131 million, bringing the total to 272 million. The sheer magnitude of these numbers should be daunting to any African decision-maker in the field of population.

Mr Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,

The African population is also characterized by its rapid movement from rural to urban areas, causing rapid urbanization. Although Africa is still very largely rural and agricultural, as some 75% of all Africans live outside cities and towns, urbanization has increased at an alarming pace during the past generation. More than 42% of all urban-dwelling Africans now reside in cities of more than 500,000 population, compared with only 8% in

1960. In fact, there were only two cities in the region with populations exceeding 500,000 in 1960. In 1950, only Cairo had a population of more than 1,000,000 in the entire African continent. If recent trends should continue, Africa will have 60 cities with population of more than 1,000,000 by the year 2000 as against 19 cities in 1992.

Rapid urbanization, resulting from rapid population growth, has been caused by factors such as prospects for more jobs, access to education, medical treatment, and the general attractions of urban lives. Many migrants to the cities, however, have discovered that their prospects are not significantly improved by relocation, and unemployment and underemployment are rampant in every major city in Africa. Increases in population cause a number of serious problems. With an average annual growth rate in agriculture of perhaps 2.5%, self-sufficiency in food production becomes a more elusive goal. Additionally, high population growth puts pressures on the soil by decreasing the time it is allowed to lay fallow; pasture land declines and the result is over grazing, which in turn causes environmental degradation and increased friction between farmers and herders.

Apart from the employment implications, increased population means over-burdened educational and health care, resulting in higher rates of illiteracy and malnutrition and a general decline in standard of health. Hence, demographic factors constitute a daunting challenge for Africa in the years ahead as the race between population and economic growth will intensify during the remainder of this century and the first decade of the next. The most important questions of policy revolve around the following issues: How can African countries produce enough food for an additional 15-20 million people each year when they are unable to feed their present populations? How can Africa be expected to create 200 million additional productive jobs - more than 10 million jobs annually between now and the year 2000 - when at

present it can not provide enough jobs for its population? Can Africa provide primary education to 137 million children that will require it by the year 2000? And with a projected urban population of 472 million people in the year 2010, how can Africa hope to cope with the accompanying fast expansion in urban services like water and sewerage, transport, health and housing, when these facilities are at present inadequately provided? These are the practical problems arising from the rapid population growth rates with which an African planner has to deal.

Mr Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,

The problem of population is not simply a problem of numbers. It is a problem of human welfare and of development. Rapid population growth can have serious consequences for the well-being of humanity worldwide. If development entails the improvement in people's level of living - their incomes, health, education, and general wellbeing - and if it also encompasses their self-esteem, respect, dignity, and freedom of choice, then the really important question about population growth is: **How does the contemporary population situation in African countries contribute to or detract from their chances of realising the goals of development, not only for the current generation but also for the future generations? Conversely, how does development affect population growth?**

There is no straightforward answer to this question, and it is worth noting that the field of population is often controversial, as there are many differing points of view. However, as far as Africa is concerned, the major issues relating to the population question should be the following:

The first one concerns the improvement in the level of living:
Will African countries be capable of improving the levels of living

for their people with the current and anticipated levels of population growth? To what extent does rapid population increase make it more difficult to provide essential social services including, health, housing, transport, sanitation, and security?

The second issue pertains to the increase in labour forces and the problem of unemployment: How will African countries be able to cope with the vast increases in their labour forces over the coming decades? Will employment opportunities be plentiful or will it be a major achievement just to keep unemployment levels from rising?

Thirdly, there is the problem of poverty alleviation: What are the implications of higher population growth rates among the Africa's poor for their chances of overcoming the human misery of absolute poverty? Will Africa's food supply and its distribution be sufficient not only to meet the anticipated population increase in the coming decades but also to improve nutritional levels to the point where all Africans can have an adequate diet?

The fourth concern hinges on the improvement in health and education: Given the anticipated population growth, will African countries be able to extend the coverage and improve the quality of their health and educational systems so that everyone can at least have the chance to secure adequate health care and a basic education?

The fifth issue is based on the relation between poverty and the freedom of choice: To what extent are the low levels of living an important factor in limiting the freedom of parents to choose a desired family size? Is there a relationship between poverty and family size?

Finally, there is the concern about the influence of the industrial countries on Africa's population growth: To what extent is the growing affluence among the economically more developed

nations an important factor preventing poor nations from accommodating their growing populations? Is the inexorable pursuit of increasing affluence among the rich an even more detrimental force to rising living standards among the poor than the absolute increase in their numbers?

In view of the above questions, it is important to frame the population issue not simply in terms of numbers, or densities, or rates, or movements but with full consideration of the qualities of human life: prosperity in place of poverty, education in place of ignorance, health in place of illness and death, environmental beauty in place of deterioration, full opportunities for the next generations of children in place of current limitations. Population trends, if favourable, open man's options and enlarge his choices. Thus, population policy is not an end, but only a means - a means to better life. This is what the concern about population is about, or ought to be.

Mr Chairman,

Africa's socio-economic ~~problems~~ are complex and defy simple solutions. Addressing rapid population growth will not be a panacea for all of Africa's problems. The solution to the population problem could, however, significantly reduce pressures on the region's families and communities, and provide "breathing space" for African governments to close the gap in food requirements and the provision of basic services.

Mr Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have outlined some of the major socio-economic problems in Africa in order to underscore the importance of taking population

factor into consideration when formulating development policy. All the issues outlined above have a direct bearing on the population variable. Yet, the population factor has not always been given requisite attention in Africa's development policy. I do hope that the Population Commission will pay particular attention to the need to sensitize African Government to the critical role which the population factor occupies in our African development endeavours.

Mr Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the population problem in Africa is real and challenging.

To the extent that population variables influence development and are also influenced by them, the theme of this analysis is that if Africa is to effect changes in the critical growth components of their populations (especially fertility) consistent with the recommendations of the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action and the Dakar/NGOR Declaration, and ultimately effect a marked reduction in Africa's population growth rate, then a viable population policy for the constituent states should be one that integrates the foregoing suggestions into their development plans.

Mr Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have before you a subject matter which is occupying the attention of human beings the world over. The recently concluded Third Meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference on Population and Development bears a testimony to this concern. I urge you all to attend the Conference in Cairo in September 1994, and to lend support to the African position as

articulated in the Dakar/NGOR Declaration. I hope also that you will pay particular attention to the Draft Declaration on African Population and Development which the joint Secretariat will place before you for review. On the part of the OAU, we will table the population agenda for the Council of Ministers as well as the Assembly of Heads of State and Government for discussion .

Since this is the first time for the world community to hold such a population meeting in Africa, I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation and support to the people and Government of Egypt to host this international meeting. I wish to call upon African countries to lend support to the Arab Republic of Egypt in this endeavour.

I wish you a successful deliberations on the occasion of launching the Population Commission.

I thank you.