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Global Consultation on the Realization of the
Right to Development as a Human Right

Geneva, 8 - 12 January 1990

Statement by Mr. Bashir S. Muntasser
of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities

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Mr. Chairman,

I have listened with great interest to the excellent introductions of the experts and the comments of the participants during the last three days on the legal and political aspects of the right to development as a human right and its practice by states. My comments today will focus on human rights and population which is an integral component of economic and social development.

Human rights associated with population are not isolated from other human rights in any given society and as in the other social and economic fields of development, raise the issues of the legal status of internationally defined human rights. Population is more associated with human rights than in other sectors because population addresses, among other things, human reproduction and the individual rights directly.

Last year in April a Meeting of Experts on Population and Human Rights opened by you, Mr. Chairman, was held in Geneva. The Group assessed the current status of the relationship of fertility, mortality and population growth to human rights concerns and adopted several recommendations submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Group dealt with the whole issues of human rights referring to fertility, mortality, contraception and family planning, incentives and dissincentives for having more or less children; new bio technologies; population policies and human rights; health care, Aids, aging and other relevant issues to human rights and its evolution and contraversies in the light of advances in the fields of sciences and technology particulary in biology, medicine, bio genetics and bio chemicals and contraception.

The meeting in fact did not deal with internal and international migration which are very relevant issues to human rights and are at the centre of population concern.

Before I continue on human rights and population, allow me Mr. Chairman to associate myself with the intervention yesterday of Mr. Youkel of UNDP in which he gave us a clear picture of the world situation today and development needs and to add the following indicative figures on world population which is the focus subject of development and human rights. These figures were documented in the Declaration of Amsterdam which was adopted by the International Forum on Population in the Twenty-first Century which was held in Amsterdam from 6 to 9 November last year. The UN General Assembly took note of the Declaration in its last session last year and requested the Executive Director of UNFPA to bring it to the attention of Governments, UN organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations and to take the outcome of the Forum into consideration in the preparation for the forthcoming conferences and specially the international meeting on population proposed for 1994 and the international development strategy for the fourth Un development decade.

World Population

- At current rates, in the 30 years- it takes for one generation to succeed another, the world's total population will grow by close to 3 billion people;
- Two years ago, on 11 July 1987, when the international community celebrated the birth of the world's 5 billionth inhabitant, the world's population was growing at a rate of 88 million people a year; today, the rate is close of 91 million a year;
- The 6 billionth inhabitant is now expected to be born in 1998 - one year sooner than projected only two years ago.

Similarly, the total size of the world's population in 2025 is now expected to be 8.5 billion, some 300 million more than had been projected;

- The world's population will continue to grow until perhaps a century from now when it will level off at 10 billion or more.
- Yearly increments over the next 10 years will approach 97 million world-wide, 94 per cent of which will be born in the developing world;
- Of the 42 countries with annual growth rates of over 3 per cent, 24 are located in Africa and 10 are in the Middle East;
- By the end of the century, those in developing countries aged 0 to 25 years will number 2.6 billion, or nearly 42 per cent of the world's projected total population at that time;
- The younger ones among this group (those aged 0 to 14 years) will largely have to depend on others for food, education, health care, clothing and shelter; the older ones (age 15 to 24) will have to struggle to find work, especially in the cities, which are currently growing at four times the rate of those in the more developed regions (3.6 per cent per year versus 0.8 per cent);
- By the year 2025, the proportion of the population living in urban areas in developing countries will reach 57 per cent, a nearly 70 per cent increase over the current proportion of 34 per cent.

The implications of such developments are staggering. Nearly everywhere increasing demands are damaging the natural resource base - land, water and air - upon which all life depends. Moreover, poverty is widespread and growing: For some 1.2 billion people, poverty is a way of life.

Population Assistance and Human Rights

The Mandate of UNFPA in providing population assistance is to determine what it will support as elements of national population programmes in response to the request of the government concerned. In responding to Governments¹ requests, the Fund will not impose obligations on states under international law, however, the Fund will support activities that will bring about realization of human rights as defined in the relevant United Nations instruments. The Fund also will withhold its support from action that impairs respect for human rights. UNFPA Mandate is drawn from United Nations instruments, resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly and its Governing Bodies. UNFPA underscores the importance of the human rights and the voluntary aspects of family planning for couples and individuals as embodied in the World Population Plan of Action, recommendation for further implementation of the WPPA and the Mexico City Declaration adopted by the International World Conference in 1984, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Declaration on the Right to Development adopted in 1986 by the General Assembly and the relevant international instruments.

- The WPPA adopted in 1974 in Bucharest recognizes the sovereign right of each nation to formulate and implement its own population policies. Action pursuant to the plan should be consistent with the purpose and principles of the UN Charter and with the provision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Socio-economic development policies, of which population policies are a part.
- Development policies including Population Programmes must respect the dignity of the individual and seek the

elimination of discrimination in all its forms.

- Respect for human life is basic to all human societies.
- The family is the basic unit of society and should be protected by appropriate legislation and policy.
- Promote the status of women and full participation in the formulation and implementation of socio-economic policy including population policies.
- All couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so; to take into account the needs of their living and future children and their responsibility towards the community. This right was first adopted in the Proclamation of Tehran article 16 adopted by the International Conference on Human Rights in 1968.

The recommendation 13 of the International Conference on Population of 1984 urged countries which considered that their population growth rates hinder the attainment of national goals, are invited to consider pursuing relevant demographic policies, within the framework of socio economic development. Such policy should respect human rights, religious beliefs, philosophical convictions, cultural values and fundamental rights of each individual and couples, to determine the size of its own family.

The Amsterdam Declaration called upon countries to ensure all couples and individuals are guaranteed the basic human rights to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and have the information, education and means to do so in accordance with the World Population Plan of Action.

Guided with these international instruments and the GA and its governing bodies resolutions, UNFPA is providing its assistance to developing countries in cooperation with United Nations Agencies, Organizations and NGOs involved in the population field to enable developing countries to deal with their population problems.

Finally, to give individuals the opportunity to live in a fair and just society, enjoy basic human rights and have equal access to development, more efforts are needed to strengthen the political commitment of the international community to guarantee human rights, balance population and resources and protect the environment which are the key elements to improve quality of life and achieve sustainable development.