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PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONFERENCE: SUBSTANTIVE PREPARATIONS
FOR THE CONFERENCE

Substantive preparations for the International Conference
on Population, 1984

Progress report of the Secretary-General

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1979/32 of 9 May 1979, requested the Population Commission, at its twenty-first session, to consider, and advise the Council on, the possibility of holding an international conference to review population developments in the first decade following the World Population Conference, with the aim of contributing to the process of quinquennial review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action and to the further implementation of the Plan of Action. The Commission, at its twenty-first session, constituted a working group of the whole to discuss this possibility and to report to the Commission on its deliberations. Considering the increasing complexity of population matters and their urgency, as well as the need to strengthen the work already done and the need to identify new courses of action for the future, the working group concluded that the Commission should recommend to the Council the convening of an intergovernmental conference on population to be held in 1984.

2. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1981/87 of 25 November 1981, concerned at the magnitude and urgency of the tasks still remaining for the more effective implementation of the Plan of Action at the national, regional and global levels, decided to convene in 1984, under the auspices of the United Nations, an international conference on population, and decided that the Conference should be devoted to the discussion of selected issues of the highest priority, giving full recognition to the relationships between population and social and economic development with the aim of contributing to the process of review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action and to its further implementation. The Council decided further that the Conference should work within the framework of the existing Plan of Action, the principles and objectives of which continued to be fully valid.

3. In the same resolution, the Council authorized the Secretary-General to convene a maximum of four small expert groups in the preparatory work for the Conference, and designated the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat as responsible for the co-ordination of the substantive aspects of the preparations, including the review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action. The Council also requested the Secretary-General to ensure a significant contribution by the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development of the United Nations Secretariat to the Conference and to take full account of experience gained through technical co-operation activities in assisting in the implementation of the Plan of Action.

II. CO-ORDINATION OF THE SUBSTANTIVE PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES

4. The co-ordination of the substantive preparations for the Conference has been carried out by the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), and with substantive contributions from the regional commissions, specialized agencies, other bodies and programmes of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

5. Substantive preparations for the Conference include the following activities: the 1983 monitoring report on population trends and policies; the Fifth Population Inquiry among Governments; the second quinquennial review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action; and the Secretary-General's proposals for recommendations for the further implementation of the Plan of Action.

6. The co-ordination of these activities has been undertaken by the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs mainly through the Ad Hoc Task Force on the International Conference on Population, established by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC). The ACC Task Force, which met at Geneva in May 1982 and September 1983, dealt with the substantive contributions of the regional commissions, the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system to the monitoring of population trends and policies and the review and appraisal exercise. The contribution of the United Nations Development Programme, through its resident co-ordinators, has also been crucial in providing assistance to governments and in ensuring their timely response to the Fifth Population Inquiry.

7. Another important input came from the non-governmental organizations. Several briefing sessions were held between the Secretariat and representatives of a number of non-governmental organizations regarding the preparations for the Conference. Relevant non-governmental organizations provided background papers and sent representatives to each of the expert group meetings mentioned below. The recommendations of the International Consultation on Population, which met at Geneva in September 1983, were taken into account in the preparation of the reports on the review and appraisal of the Plan of Action and of the recommendations for the further implementation of the Plan.

III. EXPERT GROUP MEETINGS

8. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1981/87, authorized the Secretary-General to convene four expert group meetings as part of the preparatory work for the Conference. The purpose of those meetings was to ensure that the issues to be considered by the Conference in 1984 were given the necessary scientific focus, thus providing the appropriate substantive basis for reassessing the recommendations contained in the World Population Plan of Action.

9. The expert group meetings were convened to discuss the four selected issues of highest priority, recommended by the Population Commission at its twenty-first session, as follows:

(a) Economic, social, demographic and political factors related to family life cycle, especially in high-fertility countries;

(b) Population distribution and development strategies with reference to rural development and urbanization, possibly including international migration;

(c) Economic, social, demographic and political factors related to health and mortality, especially in high-mortality countries;

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(d) Interrelationships between population, resources, environment and development.

10. In line with the Council's decision that the activities related to the Conference should be conducted with the utmost economy in size, duration and other cost factors, the Secretary-General of the Conference invited a total of 51 experts (of which 46 were supported financially by the Conference budget) to the expert group meetings. Participants also included representatives from the regional commissions, specialized agencies, other bodies and units of the United Nations, and selected intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations with experience in the subject area of the meetings. The selection of the experts took into account the need to ensure a full range of scientific disciplines and the principle of equitable geographical distribution. All of the experts were invited in their individual capacities.

11. The Governments of India, Tunisia and Italy provided host facilities for three of the expert group meetings. A financial contribution was made by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, through the German Foundation for International Development, to the fourth expert group meeting held at Geneva.

12. In convening the expert group meetings, the Secretary-General followed four major guidelines which oriented the preparation of the documentation and facilitated the discussions at the meetings; these were:

(a) That the principles and objectives of the World Population Plan of Action should remain unchanged since they had lost none of their validity;

(b) That the principles and objectives of the Plan of Action had to be translated into operational terms and that the meetings should propose solutions and courses of action which might be of help to policy-makers and programme officers;

(c) That it was desirable to broaden the Plan of Action so that it would be amenable to inclusion in, and be taken into account by, other development areas;

(d) That it was necessary to pay particular attention to issues related to human rights.

13. In addition to the above guidelines, the participants in the expert group meetings were requested to give particular attention to the policy implications of the various items in each particular agenda, as well as to research and training needs, information, education and communication activities, managerial and financial aspects of programmes, and international co-operation requirements, including technical co-operation among developing countries.

14. Each of the four expert groups met for five working days and had before it comprehensive but concise pre-session documentation, consisting of the following:

(a) Background document. A document prepared by the Population Division of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs as a comprehensive,

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issue-oriented and operational paper, intended to provoke discussion among the participants on the implementation of the Plan of Action. This document also summarized the papers submitted to each meeting and was available in the official languages of each meeting;

(b) Working papers. These consisted of papers prepared by the experts, as well as papers from the United Nations organizations and selected intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

15. The report of each expert group, including some selected papers, will appear as publications of the United Nations.

16. The major findings of the expert groups have been summarized and are before the Preparatory Committee, as requested by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1983/6 of 26 May 1983 (see E/CONF.76/PC/6, E/CONF.76/PC/7, E/CONF.76/PC/8 and E/CONF.76/PC/9).

A. Expert Group Meeting on Fertility and Family

17. This meeting took place at New Delhi, at the invitation of the Government of India, from 5 to 11 January 1983. Ten experts, as well as representatives of United Nations organizations and selected intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations were invited to participate by the Secretary-General of the Conference.

18. The Group identified the aspects of the process of modernization which lead to increase or decrease in the level of fertility. In addition to recognizing that fertility is determined by the physiological capacity to reproduce, individual preferences, the cost of fertility regulation, marriage laws, customs and social control, the Group stressed that modernization tended to modify fertility through changes in the labour value of children, the future support that children could provide to their parents, the costs associated with raising children, the levels of infant and child mortality, age at marriage and the proportion of the population never married, infecundity, post-partum sexual abstinence, the practice of breast-feeding, widowhood, familial relationships and status of women.

19. The second topic discussed by the Group referred to the relationship between family structure and fertility and the factors associated with changes in the structure of the family, particularly in the context of societies undergoing rapid social and economic change. The Group considered that community involvement to minimize the unfavourable consequences of change for the family while enhancing fertility decline was an important strategy to consider.

20. The third topic discussed was the process by which couples and individuals make choices with respect to childbearing; in this context, special attention was given to the need to reconcile individual reproductive behaviour with the needs and aspirations of society, which requires that individuals exercise their responsibility in their decisions on the number and spacing of their children and that governments inform their people with respect to the rationale underlying their fertility policies.

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21. The fourth item on the agenda was devoted to discussion of the interrelationships between reproductive behaviour and economic activities during the female life cycle. Special attention was paid to the interaction between education, employment and age at marriage, and emphasis was placed on the importance of providing women with productive pursuits other than childbearing.

22. The fifth topic centred on fertility goals and governmental actions, including family planning programmes. The Group recognized the important role played by family planning programmes in the fertility decline since the adoption of the World Population Plan of Action. However, it was felt that many unresolved problems remained to be addressed, including the unmet demand for services, insufficient choice of contraceptive methods, quality of service delivery and follow-up and development of new methods. Much attention was also addressed to the efficacy and ethics of incentives and disincentives. Finally, the Group recognized with appreciation the efforts made by national governments in following the recommendations of the Plan of Action, as well as those made by the international community in support of these national actions, and stressed the need for continuous support in the future.

B. Expert Group Meeting on Population Distribution, Migration and Development

23. This meeting took place at Hammamet, Tunisia, at the invitation of the Government of Tunisia, from 21 to 25 March 1983. Thirteen experts and representatives of United Nations and other organizations were invited to participate by the Secretary-General of the Conference.

24. The Group reviewed the recent patterns of internal and international migration, population distribution and their interrelationships with development. It recognized with appreciation the increasing level of awareness and interest manifested by national governments on these matters.

25. A second topic of discussion referred to migration and rural development. In this respect, it was suggested that account should be taken of the particular development context in which population distribution policies were adopted, as well as their relationship with other developmental issues and the need to recognize the complementarity between rural and urban policies.

26. A third topic dealt with the processes of migration, urbanization and development, both in developing and developed countries. The Group stressed the need to arrive at a more balanced approach to urbanization and migration processes than the one prevailing at the time of the formulation of the Plan of Action in 1974. In this context, it was emphasized that migration should not be blamed for the urban problems experienced by developing countries. The Group also recognized that developed countries exhibited problems associated with their patterns of urbanization and migration; among these, the "urban turn-around" (the spatial deconcentration of settlements) was identified as an issue of concern in developed market economies. Other issues discussed under this item included: the health and housing problems faced by migrants in the cities of developing countries; family

and kinship networks as key elements in the decision to migrate; the temporary nature of many migration flows nourishing city growth; measures to improve women's working conditions and their social status; and the protection of the migrants' human and economic rights.

27. A fourth topic discussed was that of population distribution policies. The Group stressed the need for co-ordination between spatial and sectoral planning, and emphasized that priority should be given to policies that promote interpersonal rather than interregional equity. The Group also stressed the need for technical co-operation to improve the developing countries' capabilities to formulate, evaluate and implement population distribution policies.

28. The area of international migration was the fifth topic, under which the Group discussed "regular" migrants, illegal migrants, the "brain drain" and refugees. In the deliberations, the importance was highlighted of ensuring that the basic human rights of all migrants were respected. Illegal migrants and refugees were recognized as the main sources of concern for the international community and the many possibilities of international co-operation in these fields were reaffirmed.

C. Expert Group Meeting on Mortality and Health Policy

29. This meeting took place in Rome, at the invitation of the Government of Italy, from 30 May to 3 June 1983. Fifteen experts (of which 10 were financed from the Conference budget), and representatives of United Nations and other organizations were invited to participate by the Secretary-General of the Conference. This meeting benefited from the discussions held during a Seminar on Social Policy, Health Policy and Mortality Prospects, organized by the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, which took place in Paris from 28 February to 4 March 1983. The conclusions of the seminar were a major input to this expert group meeting.

30. The first topic of the agenda was devoted to a review of the progress and prospects for mortality reduction. The Group recognized the mixed progress of higher-mortality countries in reaching the targets established in the Plan of Action in 1974, and recommended restating mortality goals and targets specifically for countries with higher, intermediate and lower mortality, as well as for the reduction of mortality differentials which were still significant among developing, as well as developed countries.

31. A second topic discussed was the interaction between health, mortality and development. The Group emphasized that mortality reduction and health improvement facilitated other aspects of development. It was stressed that a policy explicitly aimed at upgrading the conditions of the very poorest groups had proved to be a development strategy with very beneficial effects on health for them and for the population as a whole. The Group also highlighted the important role of maternal education in reducing child mortality in developing countries.

32. The third and fourth topics dealt with the effects of health and social policies in developing and developed countries. For the former group of countries,

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the Group identified five major themes to be considered in the adoption of health policies: appropriate data bases; conceptual frameworks for setting health priorities and allocating resources; ascertainment of health and social interventions; the need to take into account the context of health and social interventions; and the crucial role of political will. For the developed countries, the Group identified the chronic degenerative diseases as principal health problems in these countries and called attention to the effect on mortality of personal health practices, such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, poor dietary practice and lack of exercise.

33. A final topic was the implementation of health policies and technical co-operation. The Group identified some of the factors which facilitate or hamper the achievement of health programme objectives; among these, the following were considered of crucial importance: the level of commitment to health improvement values; properly formulated health programmes; co-ordination between health and other development programmes; an adequate social climate leading to the recognition of health rights and to community participation; and international support for the actions of national governments.

D. Expert Group Meeting on Population, Resources,
Environment and Development

34. This meeting took place at Geneva from 25 to 29 April 1983, with the financial support provided by the Development Policy Forum of the German Foundation for International Development. Thirteen experts and representatives of the United Nations and other organizations were invited to participate by the Secretary-General of the Conference.

35. The Expert Group on Population, Resources, Environment and Development sought to carry forward the work of two symposia on the interrelationships between population, resources, environment and development, which were held in preparation for the World Population Conference, 1974. The primary goal of the meeting was to achieve a more precise identification of the role of population within these interrelationships.

36. It was the intention of the Group that the results of their deliberations would provide a substantive basis for the review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action. Although the Plan contained little that dealt explicitly with these interrelationships, it recommended policy measures dealing with the supply of food and stressed the need for a rational utilization of resources, improvement of the quality of the environment, a more equitable distribution of income, the attainment of full employment, increase of investments in health and education and the provision of adequate social security for the elderly, which were the subjects contained in the agenda of the meeting.

37. The discussion focused on five general topics: (a) trends in population, resources, environment and development; (b) food and nutrition; (c) resources and environment; (d) social and economic aspects of development; and (e) integration of population in policy, planning and programmes.

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38. During its deliberations on future trends in population, resources, environment and development, the Group emphasized the need for better knowledge of how the trends of the various variables interact and modify each other and particularly of the role of population within these interrelationships. The Group noted that current economic trends were worsening the long-term prospects for development. It also observed that patterns of development combined with life styles and societal arrangements could have a critical effect on the role played by population factors in these interrelationships.

39. The discussion of food and nutrition centred on the demographic, economic, social, political and institutional aspects of meeting the needs for food and nutrition, with special emphasis placed on such issues as poverty, the food-versus-feed controversy, food self-sufficiency and the role of population growth. It was noted that although world grain production was sufficient to ensure an adequate nutritional level for the world's population, projections of current trends indicated that many individual countries might face critical food problems. It is projected that, in the year 2000, 65 developing countries may not be able to feed their populations if current low productivity régimes are maintained and that 19 countries may not be able to feed their population at that time, even under a high productivity régime. It was agreed that slower than projected rates of population growth combined with improved distribution of resources and income could alleviate this problem.

40. The discussion of resources and the environment dealt with the resource base, including agricultural and energy resources and environmental degradation. Attention was drawn to the various mechanisms that would expand resource availability, as well as to those activities that had caused a degradation of the environment. It was observed that it was possible to increase the population-supporting capacity of lands on a temporary basis but that many of the practices currently in use increased the risks of desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, salinization and waterlogging. It was concluded that although there was a strong interaction between demographic trends, resource utilization and environmental degradation, the exact role of demographic factors varied among countries, depending on patterns of development, the nature of the resources available and the level of technology applied.

41. Recognizing that in developing countries poverty was the underlying cause of many of the problems arising from the interrelationships between population, resources, environment and development, the participants focused on four topics closely related to the issue of poverty; these were: (a) income distribution, (b) employment, (c) health and education and (d) social security. With regard to income distribution, stress was given to the role of changing rates of population growth in altering the distribution of income and wealth. In discussing employment, the Group considered a number of alternative approaches by which countries with rapidly growing labour forces could create high-productivity employment with adequate rates of remuneration. Concerning health and education, the participants focused on the interactions between investments in human capital and changes in demographic and development variables. Under the topic of social security, the problems of meeting the needs of the aging populations in both developed and developing countries were explored.

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42. During consideration of the substantive agenda item on integrated planning and policy formulation, it was stated that although progress had been made in connection with the development of institutional frameworks for the integration of population factors into development planning, that process had been hindered by an inadequate understanding of the interrelationships between population and development, the limitations in the existing planning methodology and the lack of expertise in this area. In the area of demographic policy-making, stress was laid on fertility decline as a means of slowing population growth. The need to strengthen the institutional arrangements for integrated planning was also emphasized. The international community, it was said, should play an important supportive role in that regard.

43. The Expert Group recommended a variety of actions that, in its view, would lead toward the achievement of the objectives specified in the Plan of Action. The recommendations were related to: (a) food and nutrition; (b) resources and environment (c) economic and social development; (d) integration in policy, planning and programmes; and (e) research.

IV. FIFTH POPULATION INQUIRY AMONG GOVERNMENTS

44. Since 1963, reports have been prepared on the views of the Governments of States Members of the United Nations on population matters, on the basis of questionnaires sent to them. For the World Population Conference held in 1974, the Secretary-General conducted the Second Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development, the findings of which were an important input for the deliberations of that Conference. A third inquiry was conducted in 1975 and a fourth in 1977. The latter was concerned primarily with the first quinquennial review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action undertaken in 1979, but requested also information for the preparation of the second biennial monitoring of population trends and policies.

45. A fifth population inquiry was conducted in 1982 among all States Members of the United Nations or members of the specialized agencies. The questionnaire included questions on perceptions of issues and policies regarding population growth, morbidity and mortality, fertility and the family, population distribution and internal and international migration. Governments were also invited to provide information on the institutional arrangements for integrating demographic factors into development planning and on matters related to international co-operation in the area of population. Finally, Governments were invited to provide a statement concerning any aspects of their views on any issues they considered should be discussed by the International Conference on Population in 1984.

46. Up to mid-October 1983, 116 replies to the Inquiry had been received. On the basis of these replies, the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs has prepared a report on the findings for the consideration of the Population Commission at its twenty-second session. These findings have been also an invaluable source of information for the substantive preparatory activities for the Conference, in particular for the preparation of the two main documents on the review and appraisal of the Plan of Action and the recommendations for its further implementation.

V. 1983 MONITORING OF POPULATION TRENDS AND POLICIES

47. The World Population Plan of Action recommends that the monitoring of population trends and policies, as discussed in the Plan, should be undertaken continuously as a specialized activity of the United Nations and reviewed biennially by the appropriate bodies of the United Nations system, beginning in 1977. The Secretary-General produced such reports in 1977, 1979 and 1981, with the co-operation of other United Nations organizations. The 1983 monitoring report, which covers the period 1974-1983, will give an indication of significant changes that have occurred since the 1981 round of monitoring. In addition to the discussion on levels, trends, prospects, associated factors and governments' perception and policies related to population growth, mortality, fertility, urbanization, population distribution and internal and international migration, the 1983 monitoring report will also deal with the interrelationships between population and development.

48. The results of the 1983 round of monitoring, which will appear as a publication of the United Nations, have provided an important input for the substantive preparation of the Conference.

VI. REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE WORLD POPULATION PLAN OF ACTION

49. The preparation of the Secretary-General's report on the second quinquennial review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action was a major component of the substantive preparations for the Conference. The report, which provides the rationale for the further implementation of the Plan of Action, takes into account the discussions and recommendations of the four expert group meetings mentioned above, the results of the biennial monitoring of population trends and policies and the results of the Fifth Population Inquiry among Governments.

50. The report on the review and appraisal, which will be one of the main documents for the Conference, will be considered by the Preparatory Committee under item 6 of the provisional agenda (E/CONF.76/PC/10).

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORLD POPULATION PLAN OF ACTION

51. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1983/6, decided that the Preparatory Committee for the Conference should concentrate, inter alia, on the formulation of specific recommendations to the Conference on the further implementation of the Plan of Action.

52. The proposals of the Secretary-General for such recommendations, based on the findings of the review and appraisal of the Plan of Action, will be considered by the Preparatory Committee under item 7 of the provisional agenda (E/CONF.76/PC/11).
