

Republic of Tunisia
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Speech to be delivered by Dr. Mohamed Saleh ben Ammar,
Minister of Public Health,
on the Occasion of the Twenty-Ninth Extraordinary Session of
the United Nations General Assembly on the Beyond 2014
Action Programme
of the International Conference on
Population and Development (ICPD)

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*The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Tunisia
to the United Nations
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Honourable Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Secretary General,
Esteemed monarchs and rulers,
Esteemed ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, it is my pleasure to express sincerest thanks and appreciation to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and, through him, to all UN structures, for the efforts that have been made toward achieving prosperity and a decent life for all the world's population.

The scheduling of a special session of the UN General Assembly to follow up on the action programme of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) bears eloquent testimony to the importance the United Nations has accorded this topic. We all realize the vital nature of issues relating to population and development in view of their direct link to the life of the individual and all of his universal rights, including the right to enjoy a decent life and equal development opportunities.

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen:

The International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 represented a milestone in the area of development and population, having established a new approach to population and development founded upon the principles of respect for human rights and the guarantee of human dignity for all without distinction or prejudice. The ICPD had visible, concrete effects which manifested themselves through a number of indicators that have registered qualitative progress in numerous areas, including efforts to eliminate poverty, promote the spread of education, eliminate numerous epidemics, and improve reproductive health.

However, while Tunisia appreciates the qualitative developmental leap in living standards made over the past two decades and the efforts made by all intervening parties, a number of weaknesses and deficiencies nevertheless remain. Wide sectors of the population in numerous regions across the world, including children, women, youths, the elderly, and those with special needs, are marginalized and excluded, while some ethnic and religious groups also suffer the effects of a development gap and inadequate support frameworks and programmes. This situation requires us to marshal the efforts of all organizations and individuals capable of supporting equitable development paths.

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen:

Given its early realization of the importance of the dynamic relationships among quantitative, qualitative and developmental population dimensions, Tunisia has sought ever since its independence to pursue a population policy that keeps pace with social evolution in fruitful interaction with regional and international initiatives. For example, it has involved itself actively in the path that grew out of the Cairo ICPD, undertaking a periodic assessment of the implementation of the ICPD programme of action at the national level, and issuing regular five-year reports, the last of which was the ICPD Cairo + 20 National Report.

Tunisia has taken part in a variety of major regional and international events of relevance to population issues. Moreover, it recently embraced the agenda of the 28th ministerial session of the UN Economic and Social Committee for West Asia (ESCWA), which was held under the slogan, "Challenges and Opportunities of Social Justice in the Arab Region."

This interactive movement, together with the recommendations and resolutions of regional and international conferences and seminars, has served to move Tunisian population policy in the direction of deepening the relationship between population, development and the environment, incorporating these elements into development plans and sectoral policies, and rooting the components of investment in the human sphere.

Tunisia has achieved progress in the area of advancing women and improving their conditions, promoting gender equity and amending relevant legislation, creating institutions and mechanisms supportive of the family, women, young people, children, the elderly and those with special needs, and achieving balance between economic, social, and population growth in order to ensure higher levels of prosperity for all within the context of a sound environment.

Although Tunisia has achieved positive results in most demographic areas, we continue to note disparities among different sectors of society in terms of the availability of services and care. Reduction of these disparities and achievement of comprehensive, fair development in an atmosphere of respect for human rights and the principles of good governance remain complex challenges given the economic difficulties our country has faced since the revolution.

Tunisia's demographic structure constitutes an additional challenge which the current government and successor governments must prepare to meet. Over the past several years, Tunisia has witnessed a relatively rapid demographic shift due to lowered death rates resulting from medical advances and improved health, and economic and social conditions, as well as a declining fertility rate thanks to the national family planning and reproductive health programme, which provides its services to everyone free of charge. Changes in the population pyramid pose major challenges for our country, which has become increasingly aware of the implications of such changes for employment, education, health, and social protection over the next few decades.

Despite the weightiness of the challenges posed by the difficult transitional period through which our country is passing, Tunisia has begun to adopt economic, social and political reforms which affirm the principles of the Republic and help to establish the basic values of democracy and human rights. These principles are enshrined in the constitution of the Second Republic, which guarantees basic rights and freedoms: protecting equal opportunities for all sectors, age groups, and organizations; preserving women's gains and supporting their political participation, and calling for measures to do away with all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen:

Assessments of humanitarian conditions in various parts of the world and of the implementation of the ICPD programme of action point clearly to the challenges and deficiencies that continue to face numerous sectors of society today. Hence, we believe it is essential to pursue the path set out by the ICPD Beyond 2014 Review. In particular, the outcomes of ICPD's regional and international assessments should be employed as a basis for discussions of a post-2015 development agenda. Hence, in its capacity as a member of the open action team for sustainable development goals and a close observer of the course of all relevant negotiations, Tunisia will work to include population goals in the development agenda.

On the national level, Tunisia will continue to pursue its reformist approach in the formulation and implementation of a development plan for the next five-year period based on the results of the population survey conducted this year, its aim being to achieve the greatest possible degree of social justice. In this context, efforts will be made to motivate youth, promote a spirit of individual initiative, and involve women actors in the management of public affairs.

Tunisia has a keen concern to engage in further efforts toward advancing sex education for boys and girls and reproductive health for women, both of which, in our view, constitute inseparable aspects of basic human rights. Additionally, we intend to resist all forms of violence against girls and women, and to work toward full implementation of the principle of gender equality. I would also like to stress the importance of further support for access to health services, particularly services relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights relating thereto.

Once again, Tunisia affirms its support for the international effort being made to achieve a better tomorrow for all of humanity, and I wish all success to the proceedings of this special session.

Peace be upon you all, and the blessings and mercy of God.