



Nafis Sadik

Chancellor, in this age of Information Technology, we may measure a person's importance by the number of times he or she is listed on the Internet. If you were to log on to the Yahoo search engine, and ask it to find "Nafis Sadik" it would tell you soon enough that it had found one thousand seven hundred and ten entries. At least, that was up until a few nights ago; the number may well be greater now. And if, Chancellor, you were a Public Orator who had to prepare a citation for this Nafis Sadik, what more serendipitous occurrence could you wish for than to turn on your television set of an evening, and tune into "BBC World," and there, in front of you, to the life, is Nafis Sadik, being interviewed by the feisty Tim Sebastian on his popular interview programme "Hardtalk," where he puts challenging questions to the movers and shakers of our time!

Chancellor, I present one of the brightest stars in the galaxy of the World Wide Web, the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, Dr Nafis Sadik. As Executive Director of the UNFPA, holding the rank of Under-Secretary-General, she presides over the world's largest internationally funded source of assistance to the population policies and programmes of developing countries. In fulfilling this role, Dr Sadik has made it a major feature of policy to promote the rights and freedoms of women. She insists that the assurance of these rights and freedoms are mandatory for sustainable development, which in turn is inseparable from the issue of population growth.

In herself she embodies these rights and freedoms, having been well prepared for her role. When she was appointed Executive Director of the Population Fund in 1987, after sixteen years with the organisation, she became the first woman ever to head one of the UN's major voluntarily-funded programmes. She considers herself fortunate to have had "a wonderful father, who believed that his daughters must have equal opportunities with his sons." After graduating from Dow Medical College in Karachi she served her internship in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at City Hospital, Baltimore, and did further studies at Johns Hopkins University, before being appointed Research Fellow in Physiology at Queen's University, Ontario.

In 1954 she returned to her native Pakistan and worked for nine years as medical officer in charge of women's and children's wards in various army hospitals. It was during this period that she came to realise that the women who came under her care "really had no control over their lives:" "I would tell new mothers that they shouldn't get pregnant again for two years, but they would say that their husbands or mothers-in-law had other ideas - especially if the baby was a girl." So she asked the Commanding Officer for money to buy contraceptives. She reports that he "nearly fell off his chair." But the lady pressed her case. The CO finally yielded, though not without warning her: if she got into trouble, she must remember that *he* had nothing to do with it; it was all out of her own resources. It is not surprising that, over three decades later, an interviewer should begin the report of an interview with Nafis Sadik like this: "One is impressed by her authoritativeness and firmness."

Her experiences during those years impelled her more and more into the arena of public policy. In 1966 she became Director of Planning and Training in the Pakistan Central Family Planning Council, Deputy Director-General in 1968, and Director-General in 1970.

In the pursuit of her cause, Dr Sadik has been no less clear-sighted than she has been passionate. "We believe," she says, "that if women get their rights and are allowed to make decisions for themselves, then they will have children that they can really look after and nurture." Just a few weeks ago, in London, she rebuked the world's super-powers for lavishing huge amounts of money on military campaigns while giving only "small change" to vital health and reproductive services.

The cause of Dr Sadik and the UNFPA has not gone without opposition. Whether for reasons of religion or culture or race or patriarchy or ideology, there are institutions and vested interests that find the policies of the UNFPA insidious or wicked or politically motivated. We in these parts can understand this well enough. Some of us will remember, from a few decades ago, the graffiti that appeared on the walls of Kingston proclaiming that birth control is "a plan to kill black people." Dr Sadik has not been daunted by her critics, and will say, for example, that it "is very unfortunate that the people who are supposedly against abortion try to criminalise the institutions that promote family planning."

We in the Caribbean have also been beneficiaries of the interest and material support of Dr Sadik and the UNFPA, as witness, for example, the presence of a UNFPA representative in Jamaica, and the conferment of a Population Award in 1998 on our own Professor Hugh Wynter, Director of the Programme for Advanced Training and Research in Fertility Management.

If you look at Dr Sadik's curriculum vitae, Chancellor, you will see that she has six children, and you may be inclined to think that she does not practise what she preaches. But think again, and you will realise that that number signifies her personal contribution to alleviating the effects of over-population, because the cv also tells that three of the six were adopted.

Dr Sadik is soon to retire, and with honours a-plenty. She was, for instance, in 1976 the first woman to receive the Hugh Moore Award, named after a pioneer in the area of concern about the world population crisis. In 1994 she was made a Laureate of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population. What finer retirement gift could she get, Chancellor, than an honorary doctorate of the University of the West Indies? As a child she wanted to change the world. We applaud her now for the single-mindedness and practicality with which she has stayed true to that dream, and has, in her own way helped to "make this world a better place, for you and for me and the whole human race." It only remains for you, Chancellor, by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of this university, to confer upon Nafis Sadik the degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*.

Mona
3 November 2000