

Commission on Population and Development
Fiftieth session-
Changing Population Age Structures and Sustainable Development

Statement delivered by Ms. Maayan Keren- Permanent Mission of Israel to the UN

Madame Chair,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you and the bureau members for convening this important session. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the population division and the United Nations Population Fund for their important contribution to this session.

Changing age structures around the world have transformed the way we think about our societies – the old patterns that used to characterize life cycles have shifted, creating new challenges while at the same time offering exciting opportunities.

Madame Chair,

Israel is at a unique demographic juncture. It has a rapidly growing elderly population and life expectancy among the highest in the world. At the same time, the fertility rate has remained relatively high compared to other OECD countries, thus mitigating the ageing of the population.

The rapid population growth and changing population age structure in Israel has underscored the need for an integrative and long-term strategy, which takes into account all age groups and sectors of society.

Israel has been working towards the full integration of older persons into society as active and contributing members and ensuring that they are an asset to, rather than a burden on society.

Israel's late President Shimon Peres, who passed away at the age of 93, once said that "You're as young as your dreams, not as old as your calendar." This sentence perfectly embodies Israel's approach to ageing.

Encouraging older persons to stay in the work force, while maintaining their capacity to work, has been a top priority for us. In this context, Israel was one of the first countries to raise the age of retirement from 60 to 62 for women and 65 to 67 for men. Furthermore, mandatory

deductions toward pensions for nearly all workers in the Israeli labor market have been put in place, allowing more people to save up for retirement.

Our government, in collaboration with the private sector and civil society, has designed tailor made programs to encourage employment among older persons, while taking necessary measures to prevent and enforce laws against ageism, and change the perception of employers towards older employees.

Madame Chair,

Promoting and safeguarding the dignity, health and independence of older persons is part and parcel of our approach to ageing. This approach is guided by the concept of ageing in the community and maintaining optimal functioning to prevent disability and dependence. Older persons are provided with comprehensive healthcare and welfare services in order to address their unique needs, and maintain their physical and mental well-being. Opportunities for education, skills learning and volunteerism have also been specifically adapted for older persons according to their abilities, experience and interests.

Israeli society accords high importance to intergenerational solidarity. In recent years, there has been an intensified collaborative effort of government, civil society and local authorities to strengthen the intergenerational bond through a range of innovative initiatives. One noteworthy project pairs students who are looking for affordable housing with older persons who live by themselves. This living arrangement benefits both sides by mitigating living costs for the student, while alleviating loneliness and physically demanding housework for the older person.

Madame Chair,

Both the ICPD Program of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are about placing people, not policies, at the center of our actions.

Reaping the demographic dividends will only be possible if we make smart investments and incorporate long-term planning that takes account of changing age structures and their impact on sustainable development.

Investments along the life course, including in quality education and life-long learning opportunities, resilient health systems and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and comprehensive sexuality education will result in better individual outcomes that translate into a real impact on society.

We cannot afford to go backwards when it comes to progress on health, education and gender equality. The only way is forward, and the only time is now.

Madame Chair,

I would like to end on a personal note. My beloved grandmother, Miriam Friedlander, passed away last year only two months shy of her 102nd birthday. Despite living through the Holocaust and experiencing some of the worst atrocities known to mankind, she rebuilt her life, raised a family and even walked up to her third floor apartment until nearly her last day. And she did it all with her big, bright smile.

It is my hope that the world we build together will be a place where we can reach old age, even maybe 102, with dignity, in good health and with a big, bright, smile.

Thank you