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**Mr. Chairman**

**Distinguished Delegates**

The demographics of adolescents and youth will largely shape the future social and economic development prospects in Africa. At the outset, Africa is a youthful continent and its share in the world population will increase to 24% in 2050, up from about 13% in 2012. The median age, which is the age that divides the population into two equal groups, is 19.7 in 2012 and will increase to 25.4 in 2050. This is in contrast to median age of 30.4 for the world, which is projected to reach 37.9 in 2050. Undoubtedly, Africa has the youngest population in the world and will remain significantly so in the future.

Approximately 85% of all the people in Africa in 2012 are below age 45 while only 5% of them are old persons aged 60 or more. These ratios are expected to slightly change by 2050, suggesting continuation of the youthful age structure in the future. Youth people below age 30 will increase from about 729 million in 2012 to 1.2 billion in 2050. Within the same period, adolescents aged 10 to 19 will increase from 237 million to 416 million, and youth aged 15 to 24 will increase from about 212 million to 391 million.

The rapidly increasing number of adolescents and youth is an outcome of the demographics of the population, especially in terms of fertility and mortality. Demographically, a young age structure reflects high fertility currently and in the past. The total fertility rate, defined as the number of children per woman in the reproductive age, in Africa was high above 6 during 1970 to 1990, and it declined to 4.64 between 2005 and 2010. Currently the total fertility rate is high at a level of 5.1 children per woman in sub-Saharan Africa. Especially fertility is high among adolescents. Adolescent fertility in Africa, measured as the number of live births per 1000 girls aged 15-19, was

high at 116.2 in 1995-2000 and 101.4 in 2005-2010. High fertility is the main factor underlying the young age structure in Africa. Also, it reflects high momentum for population growth in the future.

Turning to mortality, which indicates development in population health, available measures show that it is high and it did not improve much in decades. For example, life expectancy at birth in Africa remained almost constant at 51 years through 1985-2000, and slightly improved to 55.1 in 2005-2010. Sub-saharan Africa experienced a decline in life expectancy at birth from 49 in 1985-1990 to 48.9 in 1995-2000, and a slight improvement to 52.5 in 2005-2010. Improvements in the health of adolescents and youth are also minimal. A child who survived to age 15 in 2005-2010 is expected to live on average additional 49.8 years, compared to 48.2 years for a child who survived to age 15 in 1995-2000. These trends are attributed to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other communicable diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis.

**Mr. Chairman**

The age structure is young, fertility is high and population health did not improve much in Africa. Commendable efforts were made by governments and development partners to improve population health, but the battle against diseases requires additional resources for the implementation of health policies and strategies. Particularly investment in the health of adolescents and youth in the continent is needed to address the challenges and harness the opportunities for development. Improvement in the health of adolescents and youth is important for economic growth and future development in the continent.

Equally important is investment in the education of adolescents and youth. ECA Reports on the progress made towards the MDGs indicate that youth literacy has increased in the region and gender disparities in education attainment have narrowed. However, many countries have very low enrollment of less than 5% in tertiary education. Obviously, there is need to extend progress made

in achieving universal primary education to secondary and tertiary levels. Besides improving the knowledge and skills levels, investment in secondary and tertiary education will promote the contribution of youth and adolescents to productivity and competitiveness of the African economies. Youth in Africa face the challenge of high unemployment, and are at the vortex of a vicious cycle of poverty and low productive jobs mostly in the informal sector. This unfortunate situation has created an endless trail of intergenerational poverty. A major consequence of the youth unemployment crisis in Africa is that the incidence of working poverty is higher among youth than adult workers in most countries for which data are available.

Youth in Africa are yet to benefit from national development effort, but recent trends suggest gradual change. The Arabian spring has led to greater awareness among governments and development partners of the urgent need for addressing youth unemployment in Africa. Creation of jobs and employment opportunities for young men and women entering the labor market every year is important for increasing production, for addressing poverty and inequality, and for creating stability in societies.

The Economic Commission for Africa supports youth employment through a variety of regional initiatives, most recent of which is the joint AUC, ILO, AfDB and ECA initiative on job creation for youth in Africa. This initiative aims to accomplish three outcomes:

1. Assign centrality to youth employment in national development frameworks
2. Improved livelihoods and employability of Africa's youth
3. Sustainable political leadership and technical capacity established for achieving results on youth employment promotion

Significant investment in health, education and employment will enable Africa countries to reap high economic returns from the large and rapidly increasing number of youth and adolescents.