



Bangladesh

Statement by
Mr. Abdul Alim, First Secretary
at the fortieth session of the Commission on Population and Development
New York, 10 April 2007

Mr. Chairman,

Bangladesh delegation most warmly appreciates you and other members of the bureau upon your well-deserved elections. We appreciate the Secretariat's work for the comprehensive documentation. Bangladesh subscribes to the statement of Pakistan on behalf of G77 and China. However, we would like to add the following points:

Globally, the current demographic situation has turned to be quite different from before. The number of children and youth is historically large. However, the ever increasing number of older persons is a twenty first century phenomenon. Women comprise the greater number of older persons in almost every society. Until recently, the large number of older persons did not receive sufficient attention of the international community. Countries therefore will need to respond to the new realities with appropriate policies and programmes.

The aging of populations is not occurring at the same rate in all countries. Some countries, especially in Africa and the least developed countries still have high fertility rates, and thus populations are growing rapidly. Their populations are distinctly younger. By 2050, they will still have a relatively young population. These youths, provided with necessary wherewithal, present an unprecedented opportunity of growth and development. However, poverty is the greatest threat to maximize this opportunity. The LDCs are fraught with many compelling development priorities. For most of them, allocating necessary resources for their large number of young and ageing population cannot be done without adequate external support and a supportive global economic environment.

Unlike most developing countries, the developed countries tend to concern about the prospects of population decline. International migration is making a major contribution to their population growth. Simulations indicate that to maintain the size of its population of working age constant, Europe would have to increase its net migration intake fourfold. Short-term overseas employment from least developed to OECD countries can be a win-win solution for both. This will not only counterbalance excess deaths over births, but also reduce the dependency ratio in the OECD countries, as those employees tend to be younger. The earlier we recognize the growing importance of this subject, the better we will be at managing the process and in preventing the abuses.

Since 1990, Bangladesh has recorded some of the developing world's most rapid advances in basic human development indicators. Infant and child mortality have been falling at more than 5% a year. Maternal mortality has reduced to 3.5 per thousand. A targeted public health intervention such as family planning has reduced the fertility to 3 per family. Life expectancy at birth has risen to 65. The current demographic situation in Bangladesh is characterized by gradual ageing of its population.

According to the 2001 census, 6.2% of our population was more than 60 years. The absolute number stands at 7.2 million. Approximately 80,000 new elderly people are added to this cohort every year. The projected increase in Bangladesh during 1990-2025 is 17 million+. The growth will be much faster than that of Europe.

In last two decades, Bangladesh has passed through two demographic changes. First: rapid population growth in urban areas and secondly: the demographic transition having lower fertility with higher longevity. Rapid growth of urbanization leads the younger to migrate, leaving aged people behind in rural areas.

Traditionally, the Bangladeshi society has a culture of caring for the elderly. It is common in the joint families. However, with rapid urbanization and more unitary families, the situation has been changing. Unemployment, low wages, high living costs make some of the urban dwellers unable to meet the requirements of their ageing parents.

Bangladesh, despite its resource constraints, has taken a number of steps to look into the specific needs of the elderly. The government in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and the private sector has adopted formal and informal support systems and safety net programmes. We have introduced a long-term "Strategic Investment Plan for Health, Nutrition and Population (2003-2010) with an estimated budget of US\$ 5.5 billion.

Since economic solvency is of prime importance, the government has introduced a Senior Citizen Allowance (SCA) in 1997. The number of beneficiaries is currently 1.6 Million. A recent survey among the recipients shows that 60% is spent on food, 30% on healthcare and 10% on income-generating activities such as tea-stalls, handicraft businesses, goat-rearing and growing vegetables.

The problem of caring for a vast elderly population is complex. The government alone cannot solve this problem. Participation of international community, NGOs and the private sector is key. At the global level, the available resources are far from the estimated requirements for the implementation of the ICPD. The resource mobilization target of the ICPD also needs to be revisited. Secretary General's report under reference no. E/CN.9/2007/5 is very candid when it says "most donor countries do not provide substantial funding for population activities and most developing countries are not in a position to mobilize sufficient resources to fund much-needed population and AIDS programmes." This must be addressed if we want to implement the ICPD in a timely manner.