



S T A T E M E N T

Presented by

**Mr. Troy Torrington
Representative of the Republic of Guyana
at the
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on Population and Development**

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Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the delegation of Guyana, I wish to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of this 40th Session and to commend those members elected to serve on the Bureau. We feel confident that your leadership will facilitate our progress in achieving the objectives of this session.

We thank the secretary General for the reports that have been presented. In doing so, my delegation takes the opportunity to say a special word of appreciation to Mr. Jose Ocampo, USG for Economic and Social Affairs who yesterday gave his last address to the Commission in his current capacity for his dedicated efforts. We also extend a special commendation to the Population Division for the outstanding work in which they have been engaged. My delegation associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the G-77 and China by the distinguished representative of Pakistan.

Today, in keeping with our thematic focus of this fortieth session, Guyana is pleased to have the opportunity to share some lessons from our national experience in population matters with respect to the changing age structures and their implications for development. People, without doubt, are at the centre of development and the Programme of Action of the ICPD is concerned with the impacts of the breadth of population issues on development. In consequence of the clear and growing implications of the changing age distributions of populations for development, my delegation considers this discussion to be most timely. We believe that these implications and influences should and will continue to engender interest and debate at all levels in development planning and policy frameworks for the future.

Mr. Chairman,

The unique window of opportunity for development that changing population structures presents for many countries and to which much reference has already been made also magnifies the challenges to development faced not only by developed but critically many developing countries, including those of the Latin America and Caribbean region on the whole. ECLAC's report on Changing Age Structures of Populations and their Implications for Development in the Caribbean points out that "the region is undergoing a little-noticed but dramatic demographic shift". Indeed, increased longevity and declining sizes of younger generations are apparent in the region, where the aging process is occurring much faster and under less favourable conditions than in the more developed world. Interestingly, successful basic social and health care systems have resulted in longer life expectancy and declining child mortality and this along with declining fertility rates, has led to one of the world's fastest demographic transitions.

According to the report, these demographic changes will have a major impact on the labour force and on social security, pensions and health care systems. It is clear, for instance, that universal basic social and health care can no longer be financed solely by governments. But while almost all countries recognize this, a comprehensive reform of health care, social protection and pension systems has not yet taken place.

Mr. Chairman,

Many of these observations are very well illustrated by the population data from Guyana. The 2002 Population and Housing Census pegs population growth at 3.8 per cent between 1991 and 2002 with an average annual growth rate of .33 percent per annum. This rate of growth is consistent with historical trends of population change which have shown an increase at each census. It compares with a decrease of -0.44 percent per annum between 1980 and 1991 as a result of the impact of the outflow of people in their prime working ages and a decline in fertility. The census survival ratios between 1980 and 2002 also suggests the heavy influence of emigration on the distribution. While the age-sex distribution of the population of Guyana shows that it is still in

the expansive phase of demographic transition, the data unambiguously substantiates the reality of the gradual ageing of the population. The age and sex structure of the population is important for policy planning decision regarding the provision of primary and secondary school places, adult education opportunities, health care, roads, retirement benefits and so on.

Policy implications arising from the changing age structure are clear. For instance, the fact that the oldest age groups are steadily increasing as a proportion of the total population, whereas the numbers and percentages in the youngest age-groups are declining, means that social resources may have to be re-allocated between these age groups in the future. It is possible that there will be a lower demand for school places, but increased need for health, pension and national insurance provisions for the elderly, or policies governing / encouraging return migration.

Mr. Chairman,

Several seemingly insurmountable challenges will have to be met and overcome if countries like Guyana are to take advantage of the window of opportunity offered by the rapid transition in the age structure of their populations. These include among others: the translation of the awareness of the unsustainability of many current approaches into concrete policy action; continued investment in improvements in education and other forms of capital formation; integration of women's needs in social protection; accelerated economic diversification and reduction of vulnerability; overhaul of medium and long-term fiscal policies; stronger relations with the diaspora especially with a view to encouraging return migration and on such aspect as the portability of pensions; investment, comprehensive reform and consolidation of health-care systems and social protection systems with a developmental perspective in view; monitoring the possibility of vastly increased costs for the provision of services for the elderly; and, a shift from curative to preventive health care approaches.

While not necessarily portending a crisis, Guyana's experience of the twin impact of an ageing population and simultaneous significant loss of skilled personnel through migration underscores the many and significant implications of the changing population structures on development. Equally, it points to the possibilities for enhanced collaboration among and between countries and regions in sharing experiences, lessons and approaches to meet the challenge. For this reason, my delegation wishes to reiterate that strengthening the regional commissions to enable them to play a more active role in more effective follow-up to specific outcomes from this session and in the follow-up to ICPD in particular should remain a priority. In this regard, we stress the need to harness the requisite political will.

Mr. Chairman,

Turning to the invitation in response to General Assembly resolution 61/143 to reflect on the issue of violence against women and of the strategies their respective Governments have adopted to combat it, I wish to state that the Government of Guyana has consistently pursued initiatives to reduce the incidence violence against women. Women enjoy the support and protection of the law for the full enjoyment of all rights. The National Commission on Women – a constitutional body - oversees and safeguards the protection of those rights.

In concluding, my delegation wishes to thank the Chair for the draft texts provided for negotiations during this session. We look forward to collaborating with colleagues in attaining consensual outcomes from our work to assure success in our present enterprise as well as in that of the full implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action.

I thank you.