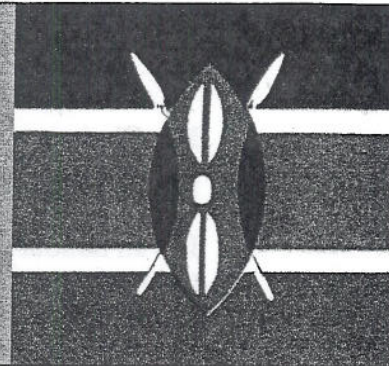




# REPUBLIC OF KENYA



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## STATEMENT

BY

**HON. JOHN B. SERUT, MP**  
*ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR PLANNING AND NATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA*

ON

**THE CHANGING AGE STRUCTURES OF POPULATIONS AND  
THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**PRESENTED AT THE 40<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION  
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

**NEW YORK**

**9<sup>TH</sup> – 13<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2007**

Mr. Chairman;

Distinguished delegates;

It is an honour for me to address this assembly today.

Let me begin by congratulating you and your colleagues on your election and by thanking the Population Division for their excellent work in organizing the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development. I also feel honoured to have the opportunity to share with you Kenya's experience in: The changing age structures of populations and their implications for development.

Mr. Chairman;

Over the past decade, there has been debate on the socio-economic consequences of population ageing with little attention being paid to another critical variable: the distribution of a country's population across the different age groups. The theme for this 40<sup>th</sup> session, "changing age structures of populations and their implications for development", comes at a time when changes in age structures are having different impacts on economic development in different parts of the world. It is important therefore to point out that the changing age structures of populations is no longer a debate but a reality.

Mr. Chairman;

The world is in the midst of a historically unprecedented demographic transition that is having and will continue to have profound effects on the size and structure of its population. The global age structure will continue to change with the share of the young falling and that of the elderly rising. While it can be argued that there is nothing new in population ageing, the process is gaining momentum and in less than a decade, the dependency ratio in the developed countries is likely to rise by as much as it did in over the three past decades. Population ageing in the context of stagnant or declining labour supply may also indirectly affect economic growth to the extent that higher taxes needed to fund the pension and health systems diminish, to the detriment of productive investment and work. This will automatically mean that an ageing population will impact negatively on the living standards of the populations.

Mr. Chairman;

Kenya's fertility stalled in mid-transition in the 1990s which has implications for future population growth, age structure and development. The proportions of different age groups in the country's population continue to change meaning that their levels and patterns of demand and needs are also changing. In its Economic Planning, the Kenya Government has been and will continue to be concerned by the following life-cycle cohorts: The children; adolescents and youth; and the elderly.

**Children:** These are persons below eighteen years and constitute about 52% of the total population- down from about 58% in the early 1980s. The socio-economic implications of this segment of the population include the provision of basic needs such as education, health, food, shelter and protection. Emerging problems arising from disruptive social changes and poverty have led to unpredictable increases in the number of children living



under difficult circumstances. These include; street, abandoned and neglected children; abused and exploited children; adolescent mothers; and, orphans occasioned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. To address these challenges, the Children's Act was enacted and a draft national policy on orphaned children is also being finalized. Within the framework of the Children's Act, the government is also addressing issues relating to violence and injustices against women, for instance it outlaws Female Genital Mutilation.

**Adolescents and Youth:** About one in three of the country's population (33%) comprises of the youth aged (10 – 24) while 56% are aged below 20. To address the issues relating to this segment of the population, the Kenya Government has the following strategies developed; a National Youth and Development Policy; an Adolescent Reproductive Health and Development Policy and their Action Plans to address the sexual and reproductive health aspects of that population; a Gender Equality and Development Policy to cater for the general gender perspectives of the entire population and; most recently, established a full fledged Ministry of Youth to oversee the implementation of these strategies. Included among these is the Youth Fund to help microfinance income generating projects by this group of our society.

We realize that education is important to the development of the human capital to exploit available opportunities and in particular enable the youth fully participate in the country's development. Since 2003, more young people are now enrolling in primary schools through the Free Primary Education initiative but the large numbers of school-going age groups is a major challenge.

**The Elderly:** The elderly, defined as persons 65 years and above, form about three (3%) of the country's total population. However, they represent a potential problem in light of the breakdown in societal structures that used to take care of them and the absence of comprehensive support programmes coupled with economic difficulties faced by majority of families. To address this issue, the Kenya Government has developed a draft National Policy for the Elderly Persons. The implementation of this policy is expected to ensure their socio-economic support including the creation of private social security programmes.

One of the major challenges facing the country is high unemployment for both men and women in both rural and urban areas. This implies low participation in the contributory retirement schemes. There is also late employment which reduces contributions to the same schemes. As a result, as more people join the old age group, levels of poverty will go up and this will be burden to the government.

Mr. Chairman;

As I conclude, let me point out what Kenya expects of this body;

- (i) To, through the UN Population Division, be a forum in which member countries can share their experiences on population matters.
- (ii) To be a forum from which the countries in a given region, such as Africa, can present their common population and development needs to the rest of the world.
- (iii) To be the custodian and disseminator of the inventory of the best practices and experiences, in the population field, of the individual member countries.

I would therefore appeal to the international community, through this Commission, to continue collaborating with Kenya by investing in capacity building in data collection, advocacy and research relating to the changing age structure. Such collaboration will go along way in strengthening the national capability to address the needs of our people and facilitate national development.

Thank you