



Permanent Mission of
Malaysia
to the United Nations

STATEMENT BY

H.E. Ms. FAIZAH MOHD. TAHIR
HEAD OF DELEGATION, MALAYSIA

AT

**THE 40TH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT
ON AGENDA ITEM 4: GENERAL DEBATE ON
NATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN POPULATION MATTERS:
THE CHANGING AGE STRUCTURES OF POPULATIONS
AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

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Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to join other speakers before me in congratulating you on your election as Chairperson of the 40th Session of the Commission. We are confident that under your able leadership and guidance, the deliberations of the Commission will be both substantive and fruitful. My delegation would like to express appreciation to the Secretary General for his comprehensive reports on the changing age structures of populations and their implications for development. We agree with the Secretary General on the importance of intergenerational transfers, ensuring intergenerational equity and improving the livelihood of younger generations through higher educational attainment.

Mr. Chairman,

The transition from a regime of high mortality and high fertility to one of low mortality and low fertility in Malaysia is a relatively recent phenomenon. Similar to the trends in many developing countries, the demographic transition in Malaysia is characterized by rapid declines in mortality and moderate declines in fertility. The crude death rate has drastically declined from a high of 20.0 in 1947 to a very low level of 4.5 deaths per thousand populations in 2006. Such a rapid decline was due to improvements in the health sector and higher socio-economic development in the country.

Concomitant with the rapid decline in mortality is the steady decline in fertility. The crude birth rate has declined from 45 births in mid-1950s to a moderate level of approximately 19 births per thousand populations in 2006. This decline is partly due to the availability of family planning services and indirectly, due to the general improvement in the socio-economic conditions associated with development. Malaysia is now at the second stage of the demographic transition. The crude death rate has reached a very low level and is expected to increase slightly in the future following changes in age structure. Fertility is expected to continue its downward trend.

Mr. Chairman,

The present population of Malaysia can be described as “youthful”. In 2005, about 33 per cent of the current population was under the age of 15 years. The current median age of the population is less than 25 years. With regards to the aged population (60 years and older), there has been a clear trend towards an ageing population. The proportion of aged population is currently at 6.7 per cent as compared to 5.8 per cent in 1991. On the other hand, as a result of declining fertility in the process of demographic transition, the proportion of people aged 25 – 59 has increased from 38.6 per cent in 1991 to 42.0 per cent in 2005. This gain is a “demographic dividend” to Malaysia, whereby the economic dependency would be low which would lead to the possibility of raising the country’s rate of economic growth and its standard of living. The overall dependency ratio has decreased from 73.3 per cent in 1991 to 64.5 per cent in 2005. The drop in the dependency ratio was due to the increase in the proportion of the working age population of 15 – 59 years as well as slower growth of the population of below 15 years. However, this ratio is expected to increase to 67.5 per cent in 2020 due to the steady increase in the number and proportion of those aged 60 and above.

In the next two decades, Malaysia will still have a moderately “young” population, with those within the age group 0 – 14 constituting about 30 per cent of the total population while those in the age group, 15 – 24 years will constitute about 17 per cent of the total population in 2020. This implies that much of our development resources will still need to be devoted to cater to the needs of the young age groups, particularly in terms of child care; primary, secondary and

tertiary education; skill development; and other social services. In this regard, the government will improve the education, training and lifelong learning delivery system to enhance the quality of human capital to meet the challenges of development. Under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006 - 2010), greater access to tertiary education will be provided to achieve the target of 40 per cent enrolment rate for the age group 17 - 23 years in 2010.

Mr. Chairman,

While attending to the needs of the younger segment of the population, there is also considerable concern for the steady increase of older persons, both numerically and in proportionate terms. Steps have been taken by Malaysia in planning for the needs of the projected three million elderly by the year 2020.

The early sensitisation and consciousness-raising efforts of the government on the issue of ageing is reflective of Malaysia's awareness of significant changes taking shape in the demographic transition. As care for the older persons in Malaysia has traditionally been within the family system, further decline in fertility would ultimately reduce the number of family members available for care of their aged dependents. This problem is compounded as more women participate in the labour market and with increasing mobility of young family members.

Over the years Malaysia has introduced various policies and programmes such as the National Policy on Older People and the Plan of Action for Older Persons (1995) that aim to improve the quality of life for older persons and to integrate them into the mainstream of development. The Government calls for the welfare of the aged to be safeguarded with the support of the family and the community. Institutional care is to be considered only as a last resort. The Government allowed tax deductions for the payment of medical expenses incurred by parents. The Government also approved the establishment of day-care centers to provide care for older persons during the day in the absence of family members. To date, 18 day-care centers have been established throughout the country. In addition to that, NGOs, namely the Malaysian Gerontology Association and USIAMAS Welfare Association have introduced "home help" to assist the elderly who stay alone at home.

For older persons who are destitute and have no relatives to care for them, the Government has and will continue to establish homes and provide financial aid especially to the elderly living in poverty to ensure their well-being. Presently there are 13 homes for the elderly managed by the Department of Social Welfare and 196 operated by NGOs in Malaysia. The Government also provided financial aid to a sum of RM200.00 per person per month particularly to the elderly living in poverty.

The Government also recognises community-based programmes as one of the feasible approaches that would be able to meet current and future challenges pertaining to older persons. Additional support facilities will be provided so that reliance on the family support system would not put great stress on family members.

Both the abovementioned policy and plan of action are currently being reviewed, taking into consideration the changes and new challenges faced by the community and society.

Taking cognisance of the socio-economic implications of the increasing proportion of the elderly, programmes for the aged have shifted from a welfare approach to a development approach. This is to ensure active and productive ageing. These programmes emphasised community participation that included the promotion of healthy lifestyles, social and

recreational activities. These programmes also encouraged volunteerism among older persons as well as intergenerational, lifelong learning programmes and learning skills to enable their continued contribution to family, society and country.

Despite its numerous challenges, population ageing also presents great opportunities. The large number of older people represents a vast pool of human resources for national development, particularly as they are now better trained as a result of higher educational attainment. In 2001, the Government increased the retirement age from 55 years to 56 years. Today a male and a female retiree can expect to live another 21 and 23 years respectively. With the increase in life expectancy, the Government is now seriously considering increasing the age of retirement.

Mr. Chairman,

Malaysia will continue to encourage greater female participation in the labour force that would enable women to contribute more towards socio-economic development of the country. As the greater involvement of women in the labour market will require creating greater balance between unpaid work and paid labour, effective labour market policies must encompass more than just job creation. Under the current Ninth Malaysia Plan, measures will be undertaken to ensure the provision of necessary support facilities to enable women to enter the labour market. These include the introduction of family-friendly workplace practices and the provision of appropriate training programmes. Community childcare and nursery centres have been established in selected housing areas to ensure the availability of affordable quality childcare. A child-care subsidy of RM180.00 will also be provided to families with household income of less than RM2000.00 a month. In addition, the re-entry of women into the labour market will be facilitated with the provision of retraining opportunities.

The private sector, being the largest employer, will be encouraged to facilitate women to enter the labour market through the provision of more conducive working arrangements that take into account the multiple roles and responsibilities of women. These include new and flexible working arrangements such as teleworking, part-time work and job-sharing. In addition, efforts will be undertaken to implement the concept of home office to encourage women to embark on small businesses.

Recognising the increasing participation of women in the labour force, steps are currently being undertaken to create awareness and provide knowledge to parents on the importance and need to balance work and family responsibilities. Towards this end, the Parenting@Work Programme was developed to provide guidance on parenting skills, ensure stable and resilient family units as well as to equip families to face modern day challenges.

Mr. Chairman,

The main aim of our population policy is to sustain population growth that is in balance with resources and development. This is in line with the Government's efforts to develop Malaysia as an industrialised nation, while at the same time maintaining quality population founded on a healthy, resilient and stable family system. It will necessarily require, at the macro level, better integration of population factors within the overall development planning processes, and at the micro-level, strengthening the family institution as a building block towards the development of a quality population.

Our development policy stresses human resource development as well as the need for the creation of an economically resilient and fully competitive community. In this respect, it is the

quality, rather than quantity of the population that matters. The key thrust of the population programme is therefore to plan and strategise for a population structure that is supportive of the goals of becoming an industrialized and advanced country by 2020 as envisaged in the National Vision Policy.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we wish to reiterate that Malaysia is committed in implementing the ICPD-POA and will give its full support to all the deliberations of this 40th Session.

Thank you.