

UNESCO's statement to the 40th Session of the Commission on Population and Development

(11 April 2007)

Thank-you very much Mr Chairman.

Mr Chairman and Distinguished Delegates:

I'm pleased to read the following brief statement prepared for this occasion by UNESCO Paris Headquarters under the item: "the changing age structures of populations and their implications for development".

My Organization, UNESCO, implements integrated activities for social development aimed to benefit ageing populations and youth either indirectly or directly, through an interdisciplinary application of UNESCO's mandates in Education, in Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Culture and Communication.

In this context I may make note of the two UNESCO Strategies on Human Rights and on the Eradication of Poverty, especially Extreme Poverty, which reaffirm UNESCO's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, without any form of discrimination based on age, and which enhance efforts to understand and address the multi-dimensional challenges of poverty.

In this regard, I can draw your attention to a UNESCO activity that is a direct response to the major demographic changes the world is currently facing:

In fact, my Headquarters has taken particular note of the chapter on “Population Ageing” before you in the report of the Secretary-General on “World Demographic Trends”.

As stated in this report (E/CN.9/2007/6), population aging is (quote) “the main demographic consequence of fertility decline, (especially when) combined with the increases in life expectancy” and “Europe is currently the major region with the highest proportion of older persons (21 per cent of the population), which is projected to reach 35 per cent by 2050” (end quote).

In response to this trend, UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformations Programme (the acronym is “MOST”) has identified “ageing” as the priority for the region of Europe and North America.

UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformations Programme (MOST) aims to broadly find synergy between academic research and policy choices. MOST is the only UNESCO Intergovernmental Programme that nurtures and promotes the field of social scientific research that demonstrate practical policy applications. The MOST programme promotes a culture of “evidence-based” policy-making – which can be disseminated nationally, regionally and internationally.

Research on ageing is indispensable, both for its own sake as well as for providing a foundation for policy selection. UNESCO finds that real linkages between research and policy agendas have remained mostly sporadic in practice. This is a challenge. It is a challenge that now must be better addressed. Policymakers and researchers can explore the means to achieve better coordination of public policy in the field of ageing, with

a clearer synergy between the research agendas and the policy-making process. The UNESCO MOST Programme has been well-suited to contribute to these.

For instance, MOST has organized with E U N I C Brussels -which is a network of European Cultural Institutes - A G E – the European Elder People’s Platform - and the European Economic and Social Committee a conference on “Multi-age Society: The Cultural Dimension of Age Policies” held in November 2006 in Brussels. The conference speakers included high-level representatives from the European Commission, UN-DESA, ILO, the Minister of Social Development for South Africa, His Excellency, Mr Zola Skweyiya -who is President of the UNESCO MOST Programme – along with top researchers in the field, and representatives from NGOs.

The research policy network that has been launched through this initiative will eventually work in close relationship with the UNESCO regional Ministerial fora on Social Development, a fora which has been institutionalized in several regions of the world. These Social Development fora of Ministers address, directly or indirectly, the issues pertaining to better social inclusion of populations groups, including the aged and youth. These fora will eventually work more directly with researchers, as we move still closer to research and evidence-based policy making.

As a closing observation, I would like to inform you that a forthcoming issue of UNESCO’s International Social Science Journal, which is a journal produced in six languages, and which disseminates social science

research results to academic and non-academic communities worldwide, will be devoted to the issue of “Ageing in Western Europe”, including an excellent contribution from our UN-DESA colleagues.

Mr Chairman and Distinguished Delegates, thank-you again for your kind attention.