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**LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN DEMOGRAPHIC CENTRE (CELADE)-THE
POPULATION DIVISION OF ECLAC**

**Agenda Item 4: General debate on national experience in population matters: health,
morbidity, mortality and development**

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Population ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean has been accompanied by an increase in the prevalence of chronic and degenerative diseases, which are complex and costly to treat, and generally demand long term care—a burden that falls disproportionately on the shoulders of women in the region. At the same time, a significant portion of the population continues to die from infections and parasitic diseases. This double burden of disease poses serious challenges to the health care systems in the region, in a context of weak institutions and a generalized lack of a social security net. Adding to this is the threat of new and re-emergent infectious diseases, as well as the mortality hump that the youth face due to external causes related to violence and traffic accidents.

In view of this situation, the ECLAC Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development recommended, in resolution 644 of 2008, that the 2010 meeting of the Committee shall analyze the issue of population, development and health. Subsequently, the Committee requested its technical secretariat, CELADE – the Population Division of ECLAC, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), to prepare the substantive documentation for this meeting.

The resulting background study details the current situation of Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of health, sexual and reproductive health, and mortality; examines the achievements of the region in health as measured by the established goals, recommendations and targets of the pertinent international agreements; identifies problems that continue to pose challenges; and warns of new challenges brought on by demographic and epidemiological changes in the region, as well as possible consequences of the latest economic and financial crises.

Three key considerations are proposed to guide policy and interventions in health in Latin America and the Caribbean: first, the need to strengthen universal primary health care; second, the need to eliminate inequalities in access to health services, including sexual and reproductive services; and third, the need to gradually but effectively create and enact human rights-based legislation, ensuring the availability, affordability, and quality of facilities, goods and services of public health centers.

The review of the current situation confirms that despite significant advances in life expectancy, infant and child mortality, contraceptive prevalence, the reduction of unwanted fertility and access to HIV/AIDS treatment, large disparities still persist,

greatly due to unequal access to health services. Particularly evident are the conditions of exclusion experienced by people living in rural areas, those with lower levels of education, indigenous and Afro-descendant populations and the poorest segments of the population.

In some countries, the risk of dying before the first year of life is almost three times higher in rural than urban areas, and up to four times higher among indigenous children than among non-indigenous children. The mortality of children of mothers with low educational attainment is five times that of children of mothers with higher educational levels, even in countries that have achieved low levels of mortality. Children in the richest quintile have access to medical care for acute respiratory disease twice that of the poorest quintile. In the case of adolescent fertility, young women with less education may have a fertility rate almost six times higher than those with more years of formal education.

The document also identifies emerging issues and challenges in the relationship between population and health. These include, among others, ageing and its implications for demand of health care, the relationship between productive and reproductive roles of the population; climate change and natural disasters, the humanitarian, economic and food crises; new trends in the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic; residential segregation in urban areas; the growing importance of international migration; and the disadvantage of indigenous and Afro-descendant persons.

Consideration of such trends in health costs projections indicates that countries in Latin America and the Caribbean will require a substantial increase in health expenditures as a percentage of GDP over the next three decades. According to projections, the financing of the health sector will most likely be a fiscal challenge for many governments, even bigger than that of pensions. It follows the need to encourage member States to project costs in the medium- and especially long-term, since demographic change is one of the most important forces in determining the outcomes of social policy, although its effects can not be assessed in the short term. The study also stresses the need for broad-based preventive health strategies in order to prevent or reduce social and economic costs of non communicable diseases.

The study concludes with the notion that the risk of stagnation or decline in the progress towards equality of access to health care and sexual and reproductive health care is real and can be exacerbated in the context of the current crisis. According to past experiences there is a risk that this crisis, along with natural disasters facing the region, will result in deterioration of health indicators and in particular people close to the poverty line will be first and foremost affected. The social and economic policies that are implemented to address the impacts of the crisis should focus on maintaining or even increasing the levels of public health spending; extending the coverage of transfer programs; and eliminating regressive elements and strengthening solidarity components of social protection systems, particularly in the areas of social security and health.

Thank you.