

PORTUGAL

UNITED NATIONS

Commission of Population and Development

Forty-third Session

Item 4: General debate on National Experience in Population Matters:

Health, Morbidity, Mortality and Development

Statement by

Mr. Pedro Costa Pereira

Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations

New York, April 13, 2010

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your election to preside over this 43rd session of the commission on population and development, which we hope will be successful.

My distinguished colleague from Spain, speaking on behalf of the European Union, has already expressed our main ideas on this year's theme ("Health, Morbidity, Mortality and Development") and we align ourselves with that statement.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reaffirm Portugal's support for the entire agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the key actions for the further implementation adopted at the ICPD + 5, and the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Our discussions will be particularly important this year, since in the months ahead our attention will be focused on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, a crucial item of our agendas. It will not surprise you if I tell you that we consider this session's debate a relevant moment to that end.

Mr. Chairman,

While acknowledging that many important steps have been taken since Cairo, we are aware that several gaps and challenges have yet to be met if we want to make ICPD goals a reality. Of course this will require further common efforts by governments, private sector and civil society and we are ready to do our share.

On this common path, we value the good work carried out so far by the United Nations in this respect, namely its constant efforts to help governments achieve the Millennium Development Goals related to the objectives contained in the ICPD.

Reduction of child mortality (MDG 4), improvement of maternal health (MDG 5), combating HIV and AIDS, Malaria and other diseases (MDG6) are some of the MDG's that will need all our attention and engagement. Equally important, and complementary, will be addressing challenges related to the achievement of universal primary Education (MDG 2) and the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (MDG 3).

Mr. Chairman,

Regarding this year's main theme (health, morbidity mortality and development) let me now briefly inform the Commission on the main progresses achieved by my country in this field through carefully implemented national policies:

Substantial improvements in the health status of our population over the last 25 years have been made possible through careful planning and enforcement of internal coherence policies, promoting interlinkages between actions taken by different sectorial departments and the full use of existing synergies.

The results from this effort involving all national relevant authorities are now starting to show in two very important areas of the ICPD's Chapter VIII:

- **Rising life expectancy**

As a result of adequate measures taken by my Government in correlated sectors – such as health care, improvement of work and overall life conditions - life expectancy in Portugal has substantially risen in the last few years, converging significantly to the EU average. In concrete terms, for the period 2006-2008, life expectancy at birth was 75.5 for males and 81.7 for females.

- **Reduction of child mortality**

Child health indicators, such as rates of neonatal or perinatal mortality, have also improved dramatically over the last 30 years, reaching or surpassing the EU levels. These improvements are also associated with increases in human, material and financial resources devoted to health care, as well as to a general improvement in the country's socioeconomic conditions.

Despite these significant improvements, we acknowledge that there is still room for improvement and that is precisely why achieving health gains was the objective of the National Health Plan of Portugal spanning the period 2004–2010.

This Plan establishes guiding principles and strategies for individuals and institutions to contribute to improvements in health. The Plan's core strategic goal is based on health gain, with an emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention and the integrated management of diseases. Accordingly, priority is given to four national health programmes:

- cardiovascular diseases (the main cause of mortality in Portugal),
- cancer,
- Human Immunodeficiency virus and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome,
- mental health.

It also makes a serious effort to promote healthier lifestyles across society.

Mr. Chairman,

Encouraged by these positive progresses, my authorities are aware that much remains to be done in several other areas, starting from health inequalities between genders, regions and socioeconomic groups.

One very important area that is receiving full attention by my authorities is the crucial one of education, for they believe it is essential to continue the worldwide efforts to enable all persons to make free and informed choices about their reproductive life, by increasing access to the information and support needed.

Progress made in the field of education, enhanced by social policies, favours not only greater knowledge of health issues, especially the prevention and fight against HIV and AIDS, the reduction of fertility, morbidity and mortality rates, the improvement of the quality of the working population but also family planning and women's empowerment.

In other words, universal access to education is crucial to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the MDG's.

On HIV and AIDS, our health services are promoting routine and voluntary HIV and AIDS testing under family planning services, prenatal care and to all pregnant women in a prenatal setting. This is an important process which, to be successful, requires the involvement of a wide number of actors, and particularly the individuals.

In order to achieve success, we are pursuing our efforts to promote awareness-raising and counselling services on family planning, reproductive health and women's rights, with the active involvement of civil society organizations.

Population ageing is another crucial area that has been receiving the concerned attention of my Government. In addition to supporting healthy ageing and health throughout the lifespan, we have been giving special support to families and fertility, through birth and child protection programmes, seen as a means of social cohesion, equity and economic progress.

We are proud that many of these measures are fully in line with the objectives later established for the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion (2010).

Mr. Chairman,

Before I conclude, allow me to make a reference to a crucial issue that deserves all our immediate attention: the sufferings of AIDS orphans namely in Africa. We need to devise how to intervene to help the affected population to cope with this reality, which has created a burden to care takers, who become vulnerable themselves.

For our part, the Portuguese Aid Assistance has been active on the ground and has developed several co-operation programmes with the Portuguese speaking African countries, some of which in conjunction with UN Funds and Programmes in the field of health. We are also supporting the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Thank you for your attention.