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For Western Asia (ESCWA)

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ESCWA's Activities in relation to Population and Development

Statement by:
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Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

During 2010-2011 and within the framework of population and development, the work programme of the Population and Social Development Section of ESCWA (PSDS) has focused on four main priority areas: (1) The demography of Arab countries, (2) Youth, (3) Ageing, and (4) International migration.

In this context, PSDS welcomes the theme of the forty-fourth session of the Commission on Population and Development, under the title of "Fertility, Reproductive Health and Development". In fact, the analysis of fertility levels and trends in the Arab countries is a priority task in the current biennium. ESCWA believes that fertility analysis provides a basic foundation in the work programme of the PSDS.

In 2010, ESCWA published the First Issue of its Social Policy Brief, entitled "Demographic Transition in the Arab Countries: Preparing for the Future". This Brief analyzes the main consequences of fertility decline in Arab countries. It shows that the decline in fertility rates will lead to an age-structural transition characterized by the emergence of the phenomenon of Youth Bulge. This youth bulge will open up opportunities for countries in the region, but will also impose challenges, particularly in countries suffering from an inequitable social system, unemployment and the general social exclusion of youth. The policy brief emphasizes the fact that governments can no longer afford to disregard the significance of such a key socio-demographic group, especially given that the presence of a large percentage of youth forming more than 20 percent of the total population could be linked to the

possibility of increasing political unrest, particularly in countries suffering from the lack of social equity and the absence of the basic principles of democracy.

In fact, the analysis of fertility trends indicates that the total fertility rate for the Arab region has dropped from 6.2 livebirths per woman in the period 1980-1985 to 4.1 in the period 2000-2005. In this regard, a mapping of fertility levels in the region conducted by PSDS revealed that 18 Arab countries had fertility rates exceeding five livebirths per woman in 1980-1985, while four countries (namely, Bahrain, Tunisia, Kuwait and Lebanon) had rates below five. Estimates for 2015-2020 indicate that fertility rates will drop in that period in most Arab countries to below four livebirths per woman, with the exception of Somalia, Yemen, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Comoros, Iraq, Mauritania and Sudan.

On the issue of fertility, it is important to brief the Commission on an earlier collaboration between ESCWA and UNFPA. In observing the ICPD +15, ESCWA and UNFPA had collaborated with the League of Arab States to organize a regional conference on “Population and Development in the Arab Region: Current Situation and Future Prospects”, in Doha, from 18-20 May 2009. In that conference, a paper entitled “Age-structural transitions in the context of improving the quality of life in Arab countries” was presented by ESCWA. The presentation confirmed, in particular, the importance of implementing socio-economic and population policies that are responsive to the changes in the age structure of the population and at the same time amenable to improving the quality of life of the young women and men in the region.

Chairperson,

In relation to the Second Priority Issue of ‘Youth’, the PSDS has formulated, in response to requests from Member Countries, a regional project entitled “Strengthening capacities of policy makers in the ESCWA region to formulate national youth policies and plans of action: Responding to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)”. This Project received funding from the Development Account, 7th Tranche. ESCWA will be implementing it with the partnership of the Pan Arab Project for Family Health (PAPFAM, implemented by the League of Arab States), selected UNFPA country offices as well as ministries and national institutions concerned with youth policies and plans of action. The Project will benefit all Member Countries, particularly Iraq, Jordan, occupied Palestinian territory, Syria and Yemen (countries currently having and /or designing youth policies and plans of action).

The PSDS has also published, in late 2009, the Fourth Issue of its Population and Development Report under the title “Youth in the ESCWA Region: Situation Analysis and Implications for Development Policies”. This Report analyzed the situation of youth in education, employment, health as well as participation in public life.

On the other hand, ESCWA held a Roundtable on National youth policies within the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), during its 26th Ministerial Session (Beirut, 17-20 May 2010). The Roundtable was conducted in the context of the International Year of Youth declared by the UN and focusing on dialogue and mutual understanding. It was initiated by a paper on “National youth policies within the framework of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)”, which presented a set of recommendations for enhancing the response to WPAY and consolidating its approach to ensure youth development. A dialogue was then undertaken between a group of Arab young people and ministers and delegates from ESCWA Member Countries. The Roundtable was concluded with the adoption of the 2010 Western Asia Declaration under the banner “Renewing the Commitments to Youth Policy is an Opportunity for Development”.

Recently, the PSDS has also held an “Expert Group Meeting on the Positions of ESCWA Member Countries towards the Development of a National Policy for Youth”, in Beirut, 29-30 March 2011. The meeting highlighted the principles, priorities and conditions for the successful implementation of WPAY. It also reviewed the positions of Member Countries towards the development of a national youth policy and its integration into the process of development planning. It was concluded with the presentation of ESCWA’s regional project on strengthening national capacities to formulate national youth policies and plans of action in the context of WPAY.

Chairperson,

With regard to the Third Priority Issue, ‘Ageing’, the PSDS has recently assessed the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) at the regional level. It has requested Member Countries to prepare national official follow-up reports and to fill out a monitoring questionnaire. Demography-related information was also obtained from ESCWA available resources / documents on ageing.

Furthermore, the Section is preparing the Fourth Issue of the Social Policy Brief, entitled “Reinforcing Social Equity: Mainstreaming Ageing Issues in the Process of Development Planning in the ESCWA Region”. This Brief will be issued in the occasion of the second review and appraisal of MIPAA in 2012. It reiterates the importance of mainstreaming ageing into the broader policymaking discourse. In fact, the issues related to elderly, like those related

to women and youth for example, should be an integral part in the formulation and implementation of development plans and programmes. The selected approach for national policy action should be based on the principles of human rights, participation and social equity. However, a number of ESCWA countries still tend to adopt a welfare-based and service-oriented approach targeting the poor, needy and disabled elderly.

Finally, in relation to its Fourth Priority Issue, 'International Migration', ESCWA and other UN Regional Commissions are implementing a project entitled "Strengthening national capacities to deal with international migration: Maximizing development benefits and minimizing negative impact".

Within this Project, ESCWA held a Workshop on "International Migration and Development in the Arab Region: Integrating International Migration into Development Strategies", in Beirut, 19-22 July 2010, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This workshop aimed at enhancing ESCWA countries' capacities to maximize the development benefits of migration through mainstreaming migration into development strategies. It also aimed at improving data-gathering and dissemination of migration statistics, and promoting regional dialogue on migration and development issues. This was achieved through the presentation of a report on migration and development in the Arab region, presentations from experts, as well as hands-on training.

PSDS has also published the Third Issue of its Social Policy Brief, entitled "Youth Migration in the Arab Region" which presented a conceptual framework for the higher propensity to migrate among youth. It analyzed the main characteristics of Arab migrant youth, as well as the causes and implications of youth migration, mainly the unbalanced age-sex structure and the phenomenon of brain drain, etc... It also presented a policy framework related to youth migration in the region.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, we at ESCWA are extremely thankful to the Member Countries that are actively collaborating with us in our population and development activities. We value their cooperation and seize this opportunity to bring to their attention the following four critical issues:

First, population variables influence economic, social and political variables, and are influenced by them. This interrelationship between population and

development necessitates the integration of population issues into sectoral and broader development plans and programmes.

Second, a rising tide does not necessarily lift all boats and an adopted policy does not necessarily benefit all population sub-groups such as women and men, people of different age groups, people living in urban and rural areas, etc...

Third, a policy should be tailored to target populations in different broad age groups such as children, adolescents, youth, adults and elderly. These population sub-groups are distinct socio-demographic groups having different needs and facing different challenges.

Fourth, we would like to highlight the need for adopting a targeting approach in the planned assessment of the status of implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action on its twentieth anniversary in 2014. In fact, there is a need to target countries and regions that still have high fertility rates and rather poor reproductive health services. Fertility analysis is no longer a quantitative analysis focused on the level of the total fertility rate, but it is also a qualitative analysis concerned with socio-cultural and economic factors leading to specific fertility patterns and preferences.

Thank you.