



HOLY SEE

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**Economic and Social Council
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Fertility, reproductive health and development

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Mr. Chairman,

As we consider the theme of “fertility, reproductive health and development”, my delegation takes this opportunity to focus on the paramount importance of respect for the inherent dignity of the human person in all development efforts. At the outset, it will become clear that the theme for this Session mandates a careful scrutiny in order to attain, rather than frustrate, the noble goals of the United Nations that are ordered to preserving the “dignity and worth of the human person.”

Unfortunately many discussions in the present day continue to be led by a false notion that, in the context of population growth, the very act of giving life is something to be feared rather than affirmed. Such thinking is based on a radical individualism which sees human reproduction as a commodity that must be regulated and improved in order to encourage greater market efficiency and development. How can such a view be consistent with the objectives of the United Nations? Put most candidly, it cannot.

This flawed understanding leads to the distorted view that population growth, especially among the poor, must be decreased in order to address poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition. It is also based upon the consistently disproven theory that population increase will devastate the environment, lead to global competition and confrontation for resources and undermine the ability of women to interact fully with society. These apprehensions contribute to the advancement of forms of reproductive technology which denigrate the nature of human sexuality. The combination of these misconceptions have led some national governments to adopt laws and policies which discourage parents from exercising their fundamental and non-derogable right to have children free of coercion and which even make it illegal for mothers to give birth in some cases or for a child to have one's own brothers and sisters.

As the Secretary General's report notes, reproduction rates vary in many places in the world. However, the report improperly suggests that the rates of reproduction in developing countries are an area of primary concern

which demands urgent action. The report, furthermore, promotes the tragic theory that if there were fewer poor children there would be less need to provide education; that if there were fewer poor women giving birth then there would be less maternal mortality; and, that if there were fewer people needed to be fed then malnutrition would be more easily addressed and that greater resources could be allocated to development. In order to combat legitimate problems, the increasingly discredited concept of population control must be discarded.

This distorted world-view regards the poor as a problem to be commoditized and managed as if they were inconsequential objects rather than as unique persons with innate dignity and worth who require the full commitment of the international community to provide assistance so that they can realize their full potential.

Mr. President,

As the Secretary-General's report notes, in some regions of the world countries are experiencing population growth below replacement level. This lowering of fertility rates has given rise to ageing populations which lack the necessary population to sustain economic development and provide the resources necessary to support these ageing populations.

It is important that the international community continue to reflect on the relationship between population and development. Yet, in doing so, governments must always remember that people are an asset and not a liability. The more governments recognize this, the more they will be able to put in place programmes and policies that truly advance the well-being of all persons, and thus contribute to the development of the entire human community.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.