

Thank you, Madam Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. I am speaking on behalf of the World Youth Alliance, a global coalition of young people promoting the dignity of the human person in policy, education and culture with over 200,000 members around the world.

Every human being has human dignity. It is this intrinsic worth of each person that makes us the most important and valuable resource of any nation. This dignity must remain the basis for the formulation of policies and laws which promote equity for all. A person-centered approach is the only way we can succeed in our efforts to achieve sustainable development in light of changing population age structures.

In the international arena, the discussion of development has found itself inextricably linked to the discussion on population. The “demographic dividend” attributed to a rapid decline in fertility rate has gained favour as the means to development chiefly because it creates a situation where workers significantly outnumber dependents. This benefit, as has been demonstrated in many developed countries such as Singapore and Italy, is temporary. In the long run, there is need for new policies and reallocation of resources to address what can be termed a demographic deficit, characterized by an ageing population. More importantly, we cannot ignore that coercive policies have been implemented in numerous countries in the name of demographic transition, violating human rights and freedoms and human dignity, and treating human beings like a problem to be managed.

Demographic structures and their implications for economic and social dynamics vary with individual countries. What remains universal, however, is that human beings are innovative and, given the right environment, they can actively contribute to development. It is therefore the role of the state to formulate policies aimed at creating societies in which each individual can flourish and achieve their full potential. Authentic development efforts should place unwavering focus on

empowering persons. They should prioritize basic health care, educational and vocational training, good governance, and infrastructure.

We empower people by investing in human capital, including through good healthcare and quality education. People should not be denied healthcare based on considerations such as race, class, or disability status. And when they receive medical care, they need to be able to understand their bodies and their options in order to exercise informed consent. World Youth Alliance urges Member States to ensure that medical care respects the dignity of all human beings, ensures informed consent, and does not promote controversial policies such as abortion, which violate the dignity of mother and child, as a way to eradicate poverty.

Education also provides an opportunity to develop human capital, not only through the acquisition of knowledge but also through personal development. World Youth Alliance has also created the Human Dignity Curriculum, which teaches children about human dignity—that every human being has it, and should therefore be respected—as a way to promote confidence, respect and equality. It also teaches children that, regardless of their circumstances, they have the potential to be excellent, to develop their gifts, and to use these gifts for the common good.

Development is not determined by the size or composition of a population, but rather by the fortitude of the members of that population. Their creativity in overcoming obstacles to their development, and their ability and commitment to work in solidarity not just for themselves, but for others. We call on the Commission to foster policies that reflect that “human beings are the center of concerns for sustainable development.” Thank you.