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MR. LIU ZHENMIN  
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

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**Remarks**  
**Commission on Population and Development**  
**Fifty-fourth session**

**UNHQ New York, Monday, 19 April 2021, 10 a.m.**

*Delivered by Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development,  
Chief Economist*

**Deputy Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,**

**It gives me great pleasure to deliver these remarks on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Liu Zhenmin, at the opening of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Population and Development.**

**The Commission is charged with advising the Economic and Social Council on population issues, which lie at the heart of a people-centered and rights-based approach to sustainable development.**

**This year's focus on population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development is very timely. This topic also has a long history.**

**The fear that food production cannot keep pace with global population growth has been a recurrent concern over the past two centuries, in reaction to the accelerated growth in human numbers during the industrial era.**

**Predictions of a global food shortage have typically been disproven by subsequent events, as the growth in agricultural production worldwide has consistently outpaced population increase.**

**However, this success has come at high costs:**

- **Food systems are already exceeding planetary boundaries for key resources and are generating tremendous food loss and waste.**
- **Current diets are resulting in premature mortality and heightened susceptibility to both chronic and infectious diseases.**
- **Food systems give rise to vast inequalities, as evidenced by the persistence of hunger and food insecurity for hundreds of millions of people.**

**The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating challenges to both food security and nutrition.**

**There is a somber outlook for the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and targets. In particular, those on ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition, and on ensuring sustainable food production systems, which are at risk of not being reached by 2030.**

**Dramatic changes will be required to address these issues.**

**Collectively, we have a responsibility to ensure a healthy future for both people and planet. This requires feeding the growing population in a manner that is healthy, equitable and sustainable.**

**The further implementation of the Programme of Action, adopted in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development, can make an important contribution to food security and improved nutrition.**

- **Efforts to increase education, prevent child marriage, reduce the number of adolescent pregnancies and improve access to a nutritious diet and family planning services can help reduce risks to women's and children's health.**
- **Nutrition education and assistance can be integrated into programmes for general education, social protection and health care, including for sexual and reproductive health-care services.**
- **These measures and programmes help couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number and timing of their children, helping to reduce fertility levels and slow population growth in countries with high birth rates.**
- **Government policies should intensify efforts to reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and to**

**encourage and facilitate population trends that are consistent with the achievement of sustainable development.**

**Dear colleagues,**

**Since its first session in 1947, this Commission has helped to build a global normative framework for addressing population issues in the context of sustainable development. By encouraging an evidence-based discussion, the Commission has drawn attention to the challenges and opportunities related to major population trends, including population growth, population ageing, urbanization and international migration.**

**The Commission demonstrates its continuing relevance by linking population trends to broader development processes and goals.**

**To this end, an outcome of the Commission will make a meaningful contribution to the upcoming Food Systems Summit. In this week, you have a unique opportunity to illustrate the critical linkages between population, food security, nutrition and sustainable development.**

**The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA, lends its full support to the Commission, together with UNFPA and other UN agencies and partners. We are grateful to the Rome-based agencies, FAO, IFAD and WFP, as well as WHO, UNICEF and UNEP, for their many contributions to the preparations for the current session.**

**We are committed to working with Member States to carry forward the many productive suggestions on the future role and organization of the Commission that have been highlighted in recent discussions, in particular:**

- **Promoting substantive and evidence-based debates on population and development;**
- **Working more closely with all stakeholders; and**
- **Strengthening alignment of the Commission's work with the activities of ECOSOC and the HLPF.**

**Allow me to congratulate the Chairs and the Bureaux of the current and previous sessions for the great strides that they have made in this regard.**

**And in closing, let me wish you a very successful meeting.**

**Thank you.**

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