

Full Version of the Statement by Mr. Ali Hajilari
Head of the Department of International Specialized Agencies of the Ministry
of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran at
the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development
Agenda Item 3: General Debate
29 April – 3 May 2024, New York

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Madam Chair,

Allow me to commence by extending profound appreciation, on behalf of my government, to the esteemed organizers of this important session.

Dear Colleagues, Distinguished participants,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

According to the report provided by the Secretary-General of the UN, an approximate 66 percent of the world population currently lives in countries where the total fertility rate stands at or below the replacement level (2.1 children per woman). A meticulous examination of the demographic trends throughout history in my country, Iran, reveals a fluctuating landscape characterized by shifts in the total fertility rate, population growth rate and changes in the population age structure. The demographic landscape in Iran witnessed a significant decline in population growth and fertility rates during the 1990s with this downward trajectory persisting throughout 2000s. Noteworthy, is the remarkable plunge in the average total fertility rate from 6.5 children per woman in the 1980s to about 1.8 in the year 2011 by a marginal increase to around 2 as indicated by 2016 census data from the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI). Subsequently, there was a reduction to a roughly 1.6 children per Iranian woman by the year 2023 making an unprecedented demographic

shift in the country's history. Simultaneously, the population growth rate has undergone a substantial transformation, dwindling from about 3.2 percent during the initial decade following the Islamic Revolution in Iran to the current rate of around 0.7 percent at present.

Studies pertaining to the perspective fertility developments in Iran highlight a scenario where, in the absence of proactive policy interventions, the fertility rate is anticipated to plateau below the replacement level.

Considering that the current fertility rate remains below the level required for population replacement, projections furnished by the Iranian Statistical Center and international sources portend a conjunction of the declining trajectory in the population growth rate in ensuing years. It is envisaged that without targeted policy measures aimed at rectifying the fertility rate deficit, the population of Iran is likely to experience a further deceleration. Hence, strategic initiatives addressing the fertility dynamics were imperative to navigate the demographic landscape towards suitable equilibrium in alignment with national development objectives.

At present, the population dynamics in Iran mirror the demographic shifts witnessed in numerous developing countries, exemplified by a sustained decline in the fertility rate coupled with a notable rise in life expectancy at birth, escalating from 55 years in 1976 to 76 years in 2021. This confluence of factors has precipitated fundamental and important changes in the age structure of the population. Accompanying these shifts are substantial improvements in health indicators such as the significant reduction in neonatal mortality rate from 32 per thousand live births in 1990 to 8.3 in 2022, and a commendable decline in maternal mortality rates from 245 per hundred thousand live births in 1974 to 23.7 in 2022. The evolving age distribution in Iran heralds the onset of a pivotal juncture as the nation traverses the second phase of age structure transition from youthful demographic profile towards one emblematic of middle-aged predominance.

Consequently, Iran stands at the cusp of a demographic milestone – the onset of population aging. The confluence of factors comprising dwindling fertility rates, enhanced longevity, and improved health indicators portend the gradual progression towards an aging society in the forthcoming three decades. In 2023, about 12% of the Iranian population was aged over 60. By 2050, this percentage is projected to increase to 33%.

Furthermore, according to the UN population projection revision based on the medium scenario in 2022, the percentage of Iranian over 60 is expected to reach nearly 12.8% by 2025 and 30.4% by 2050 indicating a significant demographic shift. This aging population trend, where 38.2 % may be elderly by 2080, poses challenges for Iran’s economy, including a decreasing working-age population, strain on pension systems, and increased healthcare costs for older citizens.

Distinguished Members,

The family planning policy and the reduction of fertility rate were among the objectives of the Cairo Population and Development Conference in 1994 for all countries, without accounting for the economic, social, and cultural variations and indicators. This policy has led to a sharp decline in the fertility rate in most countries.

In Iran, due to the excessive implementation of national family planning policies, our country is now facing the risk of an aging population crisis sooner than other countries. Therefore, we firmly believe that each country should tailor its approach to the Cairo Population Document in alignment with its unique demographic dimensions, especially regarding fertility rate and population aging.

Considering this, Iran has adopted a policy since 2014 focused on boosting its fertility rate by offering financial incentives and providing regulatory frameworks in order to tackle the challenges posed by its aging population. We anticipate that this strategy will garner favorable reception during this session.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, in order to adjust the above-mentioned indicators, initially initiated policy changes in terms of laws and regulations, including the introduction of overarching population policies. Subsequently the Iranian Parliament passed the law on the Protection of the Family and the Youth of the Population in 2020, aimed at increasing the fertility rate.

This law targets the elimination of barriers to marriage and childbearing while prioritizing the enhancement of the health of mothers, pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children. Some key benefits of this law currently being implemented, which will contribute to the preservation and enhancement of the health of girls, women, and mothers, include:

- Economic incentives for pregnant mothers with at least three children, such as car privileges, loans, stocks, land, housing, etc.
- Full payment of salaries and benefits during maternity leave.
- Reduction of night shifts for pregnant or breast-feeding employees,
- Leave without counting in the academic years for pregnant students with minor children.
- Kindergarten facilities for working mothers.
- Mother and child honoring centers for mothers visiting executive bodies.
- Reduction of the retirement age for each child born.
- Counseling centers to answer parents' concerns about parenting.
- Revising the laws and regulations related to abortion, etc.

Our sincere advice to all countries is to heed our stark lessons learned from the dire consequences of implementing stringent family planning policies. These measures have precipitated a stark decline in the number of births, total fertility rate, and accelerated population aging trends. It is imperative for countries to avert the pitfalls of falling into the population trap.

Excellencies,

As President Raisi underscored during the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023, “today, protecting the sanctity of family and marriage, which is rooted in the union between a woman and a man, is not only a global reality but also should serve as a common global agenda. Education, development, and human excellence can only prosper within the framework of family values.

Fake narratives surrounding marriage and gender seek to undermine transcendental concepts such as motherhood, fatherhood and the natural family; I call upon the United Nations to place respect for the noble position of the family at the top of its agenda and to strengthen the global movement of commitment”.

Mr. Chair,

My delegation, would like to extend its appreciation to the Secretary-General of the Commission on Population and Development, fifty-seventh session for presenting report E/CN.9/2024/2 entitled “ Assessing the status of implementation of the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development during the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development” and report E/CN.9/2024/5, entitled “Program implementation and progress of work in the field of population in 2023: Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs”.

At the same time, certain controversial and non-consensus terms, and languages in the above two report, cannot be accepted by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Furthermore, while my delegation appreciates the tireless efforts made to finalize the Draft Political Declaration, we regret to note that the text fails to adequately capture the considerations of several countries including my own and does not address our important priorities. Based on that, the Delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran would like to highlight the following points:

- we strongly maintain that family-oriented policies and programs are crucial for the well-being and prosperity of societies, a viewpoint that regrettably has not been reflected in the document. The family unit comprising a man, a woman and their children, serves as the cornerstone of the society, with its stability and cohesion directly influencing the well-being, education, health and socio-economic circumstances of individuals and societies.
- My delegation wishes to convey its deep concern about the adverse impacts and extensive repercussions of the decreasing fertility rates in numerous countries, which poses notable social, economic, and demographic challenges. Regrettably, this crucial matter has not been addressed in the document.
- We emphasize the significance of national sovereignty and the right of each country to determine its own development trajectory, encompassing its population and development policies. It is crucial that any multilateral document concerning population and development adheres to and safeguard the principle of national sovereignty. Hence, we reject any attempt to impose uniform and so-called standardized solutions or prerequisites on countries, advocating for an approach that acknowledges the disparate developmental and population priorities as well as cultural contexts of each nation.
- It is to be noted that as the outcomes of the reviews of the program of action of the ICPD and the outcome documents of regional review conferences are not UN member states' and inter-governmentally negotiated texts, my delegation disassociates itself from all the references citing those outcomes of the reviews.
- The Islamic Republic of Iran, in all matters concerning population and development, acts exclusively in accordance with its own national laws, legislation and policies. Therefore, my delegation considers the implementation of ICPD 1994 as non-binding and opts to distance itself of any references to its full implementation in the present Declaration.
- In relation to the references in this Declaration to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its full implementation, it is

imperative to emphasize that the Islamic Republic of Iran views this Agenda as a non-legally-binding, voluntary instrument simply presenting non-mandatory and non-obligatory guidelines, suggestions and recommendations. My delegation formally declares that the Islamic Republic of Iran is not committed - at all - to those parts and elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which, in one way or another, conflict with the national priorities, laws, regulations, legislation and policies of Iran as well as Islamic principles, instructions and teachings and cultural and religious norms, traditions and values of Iranian society.

- In light of the stated perspective, the Islamic Republic of Iran has no legal obligation vis-à-vis the implementation of the above-mentioned instruments and in all matters concerning domestic development, Iran's national overarching instruments, plans, programs and strategies will enjoy total priority and would be considered as the sole and final source of action and reference for my country.
- Regarding other issues reflected in all reports and documents of this session, particularly those pertaining to controversial, non-consensual terms and concepts, my delegation would like to refer the meeting to the Explanation of Position delivered by the Islamic Republic of Iran on November 17, 2023, during the 7th Asian and Pacific Population Conference in Bangkok.

Madam Chair,

The unlawful Unilateral Coercive Measures imposed by the United States have blocked our access to life-saving medicine and medical equipment among others, thus, impeding our national health initiatives. It is to be noted that the imposition of unilateral coercive measures as unfoundedly claimed by the US, does not include medicine and food, but in practice, medicine and food are subject to UCMs. No pharmaceutical, food and agricultural companies producing critical medicines and food are willing to sell their products to Iran. Beyond the medical field, there are several other ways in which unilateral coercive measures are hurting ordinary

Iranians every day. Another aspect is the shortage of some foodstuffs. Like medicines, the export of wheat, barley, corn, and other food items to Iran is not officially banned, but major global traders have halted their supply agreements with Iran because the UCMs have paralyzed the banking systems required to secure related payments. Despite all the efforts by the Iranian people, the full success of those policies has been hindered by the harshness of the illegitimate unilateral coercive measures. These illegal measures are inconsistent with the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations and have negative impacts on partnerships, cooperation, and capacity building for addressing challenges related to population, food security, nutrition, and sustainable development.

It is to be noted that my country is generously hosting millions of refugees, displaced persons and illegal migrants from neighboring countries for more than 4 decades and provides them with the same facilities as offered to our own nationals in the absence of effective international assistance and support. This happens while Iran is under harshest unilateral sanctions. Based on that, we strongly urge all independent countries and the international community to firmly reject the promulgation of such illegal measures.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to refer to a segment of the address by Her Excellency Ms. Amina Mohamed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, delivered during the opening session of the ongoing meeting of the CPD, two days ago, on 29th of April 2024. Despite its critical importance, this particular segment of her remarks has been glaringly absent from the final written record. While we understand the reasoning behind its exclusion, we are compelled to question the decision to omit such an important aspect of her address, particularly given its inclusion in the visual recording. I would now like to present this excluded excerpt for your consideration:

I quote: "Let me add my voice to the tragedies that we see in Gaza, where the suffering of women and children should no longer be tolerated. We need to find our moral compass and come back to the rights of all women, young women, and children in these tragic times".

We align wholeheartedly with this excluded part and express our strong conviction that this omission is unacceptable, as it effectively silences the voices of the Palestinians in Gaza and diminishes the critical nature of their plight.

I would like to strongly condemn the heinous genocidal atrocities committed by the Israeli regime against the civilian populations including innocent children, women, and the elderly in the occupied Palestine. These crimes have flagrantly violated the right to life, freedom, education, and other fundamental rights and principles of humanity. The Israeli regime has committed "atrocities" and "collective punishment" that are explicitly prohibited under international law, leaving no doubt that their actions are clear violations of international law and clear examples of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirms its support for the just cause of the Palestinian people and the full realization of all their inalienable rights, especially their inherent right to self-determination. The human rights and international law violations by this apartheid regime will only end when the occupation ends, and the Palestinian people attain their rights and lands, and the neighboring countries of Palestine will also regain their occupied lands. The United Nations must put an immediate stop to this unjustifiable and unacceptable situation and compel the Israeli regime to cease, immediately and completely, all its crimes against Palestinians; lift the unlawful and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip; end the occupation of all Palestinian territories, the occupied Syrian Golan, and parts of Lebanon; and hold that regime accountable for committing the gravest international crimes for over several decades. Without effective measures NOW to stop the ongoing genocide in Gaza, there will be no redemption afterwards for the International Community.

Dear Colleagues,

At the end, the most important measures taken by my country in line with some objectives outlined in the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, are mentioned:

The Government has ensured full access to all health services for mothers, infants, children, women, and girls across all urban and rural areas. These crucial services predominantly provided through the primary health care (PHC) system and are offered either at minimal and affordable cost or free of charge. This groundbreaking initiative guarantees equitable access to high-quality health care services for all individuals, irrespective of their socioeconomic background. The Government's unwavering commitment to the health and welfare of its population is commendable. Here are some of the most important services offered:

- Free prenatal and postnatal care services.
- Free natural childbirth preparation classes.
- Free natural childbirth delivery services.
- Integrated prevention and early diagnosis of infertility within the health network system.
- Full coverage of infertility treatment insurance with a service leveling system in place.
- Prevention and control of unsafe abortions.
- Free tele-consultations on healthy fertility and pregnancy.
- Distribution of over twenty types of free supplements.
- Training and counseling for young couples to encourage timely marriage and childbearing, provided at no cost.
- Women's cancer screening offered free of charge.
- Screening and treatment of sexually transmitted infections.
- Education and counseling on healthy fertility and childbearing.

These essential services reflect a commitment to safeguarding the health and wellbeing of all individuals, showcasing a proactive approach towards promoting overall health.

In Iran, the principle of family dignity, motherhood, and the value of having children are three important principles in the provision of health-care services for women. We firmly uphold the belief that women possess the right to natural marriage, motherhood, and the benefits of pregnancy and breastfeeding, within the framework of our country's health-care services.

In conclusion, while stressing the paramount significance of upholding the respect for the noble position of the family as a top priority, I reassert the sovereign right of each country in formulating, adopting, and implementing its population, education, and development policies in conformity with their national laws and in consistency with their religious, cultural and social contexts.

Thank you.