



# ARMENIA

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Population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development**

Statement by Mrs. Lena Terzikian, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

Honorable Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to you Mr. Chairman and the Bureau members on your election and wish you success in your work at this session of the Commission on Population and Development.

Global initiatives for poverty eradication and human development in the beginning of 2000's coincided with Armenia's thrust to review national policies and focus on human development issues. The Millennium Declaration includes the challenges faced by all countries around the world and effectively reinforces the goals underlying the activities of our Government.

In 2003 the Government of Armenia adopted the Poverty Reduction Strategic Program 2003-2015 which attempted to address poverty, inequality, powerlessness and the resultant civic disengagement in the country as a consequence of dire economic conditions in the early years of independence. With the objective to get the vast majority of the population out of the existing situation, the PRSP pursues the objective to reduce poverty as a hindrance to economic, social and human development and progress in our country. The main goal of this national strategy is to ensure equal opportunities for all the layers of the population, urban, as well as rural.

Mr. Chairman,

The rapid economic growth with the average of 12.9% for the last five years compelled the Government to review the PRSP and devise more stringent indicators to be achieved by 2015. The factual poverty indicators for 2005 corresponded to the objectives for 2014, and the income Gini coefficient for 2005 was lower than the one initially envisaged for 2015. Unprecedented growth in average wages with over 68% only in 2006

became the main reason for the poverty reduction in the country. Currently a new PRSP-2 is before the Cabinet for consideration.

The consistent double-digit economic growth, significant reduction of poverty and inequality was accompanied by faster exacerbation of disparity in development between urban and rural areas. While the capital of Armenia was transformed into a vibrant city, and the second and third largest cities are quickly approaching their revival, the poverty level in rural areas exceeds that of urban centers 1.2 times and half of Armenia's poor still live in rural communities.

Rural areas have higher levels of social isolation, lack of access to information, markets, educational and health care services and consequently, human poverty. The lack of basic infrastructure reduces incomes, increases poverty and erodes people's sense of community. It discourages business from expanding, and renders difficult, if not impossible, the process of attracting and keeping technical and other expertise.

The Government of Armenia views rural development as a priority and means for eradication of extreme poverty. Though it has dropped significantly reaching 5.5% in 2006, which is 3 times lower than the indicators envisaged in PRSP-1, a vast amount of work needs to be done to achieve its total eradication. Devising of cluster-based rural development projects, especially in border areas has proved to be an effective vehicle to this end. Border villages have strategic importance for Armenia as they are vital for security reasons and for the overall sustainable development of the country. Realizing projects in the border villages also creates a valid perspective for cross-border cooperation.

The Rural Development Program, having a broadest possible participation of all stakeholders involving the Diaspora, individual sponsors, international organizations and donor countries, focuses on local ownership and participation while developing village-specific comprehensive and consistent projects. This strategy also stresses the need to establish sales markets, develop financing and insurance institutions for agricultural programs and also provide wider possibilities for non-farm activities. The three pillars of the program are: engaging and involving community, building infrastructure, while protecting environment and facilitating economic development. In partnership with international organizations, these programs aim at bringing irrigation and drinking water, paved roads, gas and electricity, access to health care, education, telephone, television and internet services to each and every village. Its objective is to boost regional economic prospects and attractiveness, thus vitalizing rural communities, reversing traditionally strong urbanization tendencies in the country and minimizing out-migration. If continued unimpeded, these tendencies might result in unequal distribution of population, depopulation of the village communities which will negatively impact the geostrategic and economic security of the country.

Mr. Chairman,

To better address the challenges ahead, the Government of Armenia has adopted a number of Strategies complementing the PRSP in its objective of achieving the MDGs and sustainable development: The 2004-2015 National Plan of Action for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, 2004-2010 National Action Plan on Improving the status of Women and Enhancing Their Role in Society; the Anti-Corruption Strategy; the 2007-2009 National Action Plan for Fighting against Trafficking. Several others, such as the 2008-2015 Program for the Social Protection of the Elderly and the 2008-2012 Strategy on the State Youth Policy are currently under consideration.

The achievement of positive results in reducing poverty and sustaining equal opportunities for all the groups of the population, vulnerable ones in particular, require combined efforts from the state and civil society, international organizations and NGO's. This implies raising the capacity and capabilities of the civil society and increasing its participation in both development and implementation of the programs and projects. Widest possible participation from all social strata is the precondition for the success of all Government Programs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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