



HOLY SEE

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**Statement by H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore
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**Economic and Social Council
41st session of the Commission on Population and Development**

**On Item 3:
World population monitoring, focusing on population distribution,
urbanization, internal migration and development**

New York, 8 April 2008

Mr. Chairman,

This session of the Commission on Population and Development comes at this historic juncture when, for the first time in history, the number of urban inhabitants will surpass the number of people living in rural areas. This session therefore calls on us to reflect on this phenomenon and take stock of the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

The urbanization of world populations provides new opportunities for economic growth. With access to higher wages and better social services such as education, health, transportation, communications, safe water supplies and sanitation, migrants from rural to urban settings are more likely to advance their personal and social development.

When addressing the issues of migration and development, we must place the needs and concerns of peoples first. Placing the human person at the service of economic or environmental considerations creates the inhuman effect of treating people as objects rather than subjects. Migration and the urbanization of societies should not be purely measured in terms of their economic impact. In finding ways to address the serious challenges posed by massive internal and transnational migrations, let us not forget that at the heart of this phenomenon is the human person. Thus we must also address the reasons why people move, the sacrifices they make, the anguish and the hopes that accompany migrants. Migration often places great strain on migrants, as they leave behind families and friends, socio-cultural and spiritual networks.

As the Secretary General's report rightly illustrates, while urbanization has created better opportunities for individuals and their families, the move from agricultural settings to urban centers also create myriad challenges. Indeed, new environmental, social and economic problems emerge with the birth of mega cities. But one of the most pressing and painful consequences of rapid urbanization is the increasing number of people living in urban slums. As recently as 2005 over 840 million people around the world lived in such conditions. Lacking in almost everything, these individuals can lose their sense of self-worth and inherent dignity. They become trapped in a vicious cycle of extreme poverty and marginalization. They squat on state or other people's properties. They

feel powerless to demand even the most basic public services. Children are not in schools, but in waste dumpsites eking out a living from scavenging. Policy makers and civil society actors must put these people and their concerns among the priorities in their decision-making.

While urbanization provides a net growth in terms of economic development, we must not lose sight of the daunting challenges that rural communities face, particularly those in developing countries. If we are to achieve the MDGs by 2015, greater concern must be given to those communities, in which approximately 675 million still lack access to safe drinking water and two billion live without access to basic sanitation. National and international policies would do well to ensure that rural communities have access to higher quality and more accessible social services.

Mr. Chairman,

For its part, the Holy See and its institutions remain committed to addressing the concerns of all migrants and to finding ways to collaborate with all, in order to ensure a proper balance between the just concerns of state and those of individual human beings. Helping migrants meet their basic needs does not only aid their transition and help keep families together. It is also a positive way to encourage them to become productive, responsible, law-abiding and contributors to the common good of the society.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.