

**STATEMENT BY ELENA ZUÑIGA HERRERA, SECRETARY GENERAL OF
THE NATIONAL POPULATION COUNCIL OF MEXICO, DURING THE
41ST SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND
DEVELOPMENT**

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First of all, on behalf of the Mexican Government, I would like to thank the General Secretariat and the United Nations Economic and Social Council and Population Division for their invaluable contribution to the organization of the 41st Session of the Commission on Population and Development.

Since its institutionalization in 1974, one of the main aims of my countries' national population policy has been to encourage the territorial distribution of the population in keeping with the potential of sustainable regional development. On that time, Mexico was characterized by its rapid urbanization process, resulting from high demographic growth but, above all, mass migration from the country to the cities, the main feature of which was the excessive concentration of the urban population in the country's three main metropolises.

In recent decades, we have seen a new geography of internal migration, due to the increased diversification of productive activities within national territory. Nowadays, most flows are of urban origin and aimed primarily at medium-sized cities (with one hundred thousand to less than a million inhabitants) which has helped increase the distribution of urban population to various regions throughout the country.

Nowadays, Mexico has one of the most extensive and vigorous urban systems in Latin America, comprising 363 cities with over 15,000 inhabitants, in which over 72.1% of the national population resides. However, more than half the urban population is concentrated in just eleven cities, making Mexico one of the countries with the highest indices of urban concentration in the region. In several of these cities, problems of pollution, urban congestion, and provision of public services become more acute.

In addition to this concentration, rural population continues to be widely scattered among thousands of small localities, a situation that hampers residents' access to basic social services. This year, rural population of Mexico is estimated at 29.8 million inhabitants, accounting for 28% of the national total. The problems of rural localities are reflected in the fact that these localities shelter two out of every three persons suffering from food or extreme poverty, and three out of every five persons experiencing

skills poverty. Urban zones, however, comprise slightly more than half the population suffering from asset poverty.

Over the next few decades, Mexico will reinforce its urban profile. According to projections drawn up by the National Population Council, over the next 22 years, the country's population will rise by 14.3 million as a result of the 15.2 million increase in the number of inhabitants in urban zones and the reduction of rural areas by slightly more than 900,000 inhabitants.

Given this scenario, Mexico's population policy acknowledges the importance of promoting the balanced development of our system of cities and reinforcing their links with rural zones as the best alternative for reducing regional inequalities and expanding the population's choices of residence and migratory destination.

There is a consensus that the country's territorial development depends on the favorable insertion of each of our regions in the process of economic globalization, in which cities play a key role as the interface for linking local development processes. Within this framework, actions are carried out to expand competitive advantages of our cities in keeping with their geographical location, regional function, availability of resources and productive location, including the expansion and modernization of communications and transport infrastructure, development of education centers, research and development, and human capital training linked to local economic activities, as well as modernization of administrative structures and processes that will reduce transaction costs and encourage productive investment in cities.

In the rural setting, overcoming poverty and accumulated social setback requires us to go beyond welfare measures regarding food, education, health and housing, and to encourage productive and organizational development of communities, on the basis of sustainable use of their natural resources. Within this line, development strategies are oriented towards diversifying the economy of rural zones and improving their links with urban markets, by encouraging agricultural and non-agricultural activities with the capacity to generate employment and income for the working age population. Likewise, particular emphasis has been placed

on improving the physical accessibility of rural communities and reinforcing the centrality of those with greater advantages for providing basic services, as alternative means of attending the population living in small, scattered, isolated localities.

Territorial approach of public policies has also made it possible to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of programs designed to achieve urban and rural development, through the convergence of multisectoral actions and projects, such as coordinated participation of the three orders of government, as well as private and social sectors.

Given the negative impact on environment and on the quality of life of people of certain specific patterns of human settlement, my government has encouraged programs aimed at improving the habitat of urban and rural population, particularly of people residing in highly and extremely highly marginalized zones, and promoted the supply of affordable land, housing and basic services that will contribute to orderly, sustainable growth of cities and population centers, as well as reducing their vulnerability to natural disasters.

Recognizing the importance of this forum, Mexico urges the international community to strengthen its collaboration links to help nations in reducing their territorial imbalances and expand their inhabitants' choices of migration and development.

Thank you