



Statement
by

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Commission on Population and Development
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Population distribution, Urbanization, Internal Migration and Development
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At the outset let me congratulate you Mr. Chairman and the members of the Bureau on your election and I pledge our full cooperation to you. This year's General Debate on population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development is timely, in view of the ongoing globalization of every aspect of human life. Several reports prepared by the Secretary General to assist the consideration of this item and statements made by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs as well as the Executive Director of the UN Population Fund and the Director of the Population Division of DESA have all made important and enlightening contributions to this debate.

In this regard, Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of G77 and China.

As clearly expressed in the report of the Secretary-General and by several other lead contributors of this debate, the world population is being inexorably transformed from mostly rural to predominantly urban. This transition that commenced gradually with the industrial revolution has now gained greater momentum in view of the globalization of social and economic forces and the resultant rapid growth in some sectors of the economy. However, patterns of migration from rural to urban and the speed at which this phenomena takes place differ from country to country based on socio economic status, infrastructure and geographical location of each countries. Another important factor in some countries is the quality of human resources development that begets an acute desire for upward mobility of the population. In this context, it has become apparent that in some instances the resultant internal migration can be easily extended and connected to the international migration. Therefore, question arises as to how to delineate the issues of internal migration with that of international migration due to such symbiotic links. For instance, in Sri Lanka where more than ten percent of the population are migrant workers abroad, the distinction between internal and international migration blur and opportunities, constraints and impact of migration process encompass both internal and international migration. And in Sri Lanka, lack of comprehensive and feasible definitions for urban and sub urban population categories compounds the issue further and therefore is a matter of concern. Therefore, there is an urgent need to delineate migration patterns in the country, and so far an internal migration survey has not been conducted to identify flows, reasons, seasonality and attraction.

Since independence 60 years ago, successive governments in Sri Lanka have committed itself to implement social and welfare policies both in urban and rural regions resulting greater human development. As a result, today Sri Lanka enjoys very high literacy for men and women and a low rate of population growth, high life expectancy and several other excellent social indicators contributing to the human wellbeing. These achievements were also the result of the empowerment of women, a long held policy of successive governments of Sri Lanka. However, despite such achievements in physical quality of life of the people of Sri Lanka, economic growth has not kept pace and only recently Sri Lanka has reached the group of middle income countries.

In this context, the pace of urbanization during the past two decades in Sri Lanka has continued to be slow due to the weakening of both "push" and "pull" factors. The push factors have been weakened due to efforts by government towards rural development to uplift rural communities and to eliminate large urban-rural disparities in living conditions. The "pull" factors have been weakened by the low level of growth and investment in the industrial and other modern service sectors in the cities. But the latter has also lead to international migration in search of better centers of industrialization and economic prospects. The Government has implemented rural development initiatives based on a national road development program and a rural re-awakening program and a national infrastructure development initiative. Ten year development vision of the President of Sri Lanka includes continuous qualitative upgrading of education and health programmes in all areas, but focusing more on the village and the periphery.

The pace of urbanization in Sri Lanka is expected to accelerate in the coming decades, due to sustained economic growth centered around industrial zones in the cities leading to the growth of small and medium size towns around the major cities. According to projections of urban population, the percentage of population living in urban areas is expected to increase to 42 per cent in 2030. As a result, increased environmental pollution, changes in occupational and consumption patterns and life styles has contributed to adverse health and social concerns attributable to modern city life.

The challenge for developing countries is to find sufficient resources to address urgent priorities associated with the impact of rapid urbanization and migration trends, while at the same time providing necessary support for development needs. Uneven distribution of population is a challenge which Sri Lanka faces. This is mainly due to uneven mobilization of resources among different regions which has resulted in disproportionate infrastructure development, job opportunities and investments. In order to continue providing welfare and social services to upwardly mobile population in Sri Lanka, there is an acute need of maintaining a reliable data base on the basis of regular surveys. However, this has been hampered by lack of financial and human resources and terrorist activities in some part of the country. In this regard we need the support of the international community in both mobilizing resources and defeating terrorism.

Ageing, but increasing exponentially

We therefore, call the international community and our development partners to focus on issues of concern in developing countries that are in the threshold of major demographic transition.
