

United States Statement  
Regarding the Secretary General's Reports  
41<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on Population and Development  
April 7, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for this opportunity to address the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on Population and Development. My name is Darlene Williams. I am Assistant Secretary for Policy Development and Research, with the Department of Housing and Urban Development. It is an honor to be here today speaking on behalf of the United States government. I would like to congratulate you on your election as Chairman. I am certain that you will do an outstanding job and that this will be a successful and productive Session.

The United States would like to thank the United Nations Population Division and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for their work in preparing this Session of the CPD. This Session addresses the immense changes in global population distribution that have taken place in recent decades, and that will shape the world for years to come. For the first time in history, rural populations no longer exceed urban populations - humanity has reached an even balance between the two. As we know, this will be a very temporary equilibrium because the world's urban population will soon surpass its rural. When that happens, we will be living in a world we have never experienced before, with wide-ranging policy implications for governments in all corners of the globe.

My delegation would like to offer comments on the three Reports of the Secretary General presented this morning. First, we commend the excellent reports titled "***World population monitoring, focusing on population distribution, urbanization, internal migration, and development***" and "***Monitoring of population programmes focusing on population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development***" for their comprehensive analyses. These documents highlight the trends in urban and rural populations that changed the level of world urbanization from just 30% in 1950 to 50% today.

The United States agrees on the many economic benefits to be gained from urbanization, and that urbanization is a critical element of economic

growth. As the first report notes, there is a positive correlation between per capita income and level of urbanization. While there is still much debate on the complex relationship between urbanization and economic growth, it remains essential for governments to recognize their role in creating enabling environments and pro-poor, pro-growth policies so that urbanization raises standards and the quality of life for city-dwellers.

The international community has expended much effort on the debate regarding the relative importance of urban and rural development, with each side making claims to primacy. Rather than adding to the debate, the United States believes that it is important to address urbanization as an issue that affects both urban and rural areas. Many local governments are responsible for governing both rural and urban populations, and the interplay between urban and rural areas regarding issues such as employment, food production and distribution, environmental stewardship, education, and healthcare is one that necessitates a comprehensive focus rather than a sectoral one.

Therefore, the United States does not endorse definitive statements such as “All the evidence indicates that people benefit from living in urban areas,” as the first report asserts in paragraph 4. We do not favor urbanization and rural-urban migration for their own sakes, as the sentence seems to imply, but rather support working with local institutions to enhance their capability to address urban and spatial issues, and urban-rural linkages that will improve the lives of both the urban and rural poor. My delegation agrees that “The continued urbanization of the world population may be necessary to ensure sustainable development,” as paragraph 7 states. However, continued urbanization without sufficient planning by local, regional, and national institutions is not likely to lead to sustainable development, but rather exacerbate the issues that cities currently face.

Accordingly, we do not believe that faster urbanization should be encouraged in all cases, as paragraph 8 in the first report seems to suggest. Neither, however, should urbanization be hindered. Governments should prepare and provide options to deal with increased urbanization rather than merely allowing it to occur and then coping as best they can with the results. Well-planned and managed urban centers will enable a better quality of life for both urban and rural dwellers.

Living conditions and associated health and mortality indicators are, we recognize, on average better in urban than rural settings. Infant and child mortality are lower in urban than rural settings. Infrastructure such as sanitation, potable water, and electricity is usually better in cities, as are educational opportunities. Overall, urban conditions are better than rural. In pockets, however, and especially in slums, urban dwellers have living conditions that approach or are even worse than rural dwellers. We encourage better property rights systems as tools to mitigate the housing and poverty issues in these areas.

The United States notes the analyses by the two reports that the rural poor are declining in both absolute numbers and as a percentage of the world's poor, while urban poor are increasing in both categories. These trends will continue for decades, so we must be prepared to deal with both urban and rural poor for the foreseeable future.

Although the reports examine many important issues in urbanization and recommend partnerships between local governments and NGOs to help improve the lives of urban dwellers, my delegation believes the documents neglect the critical role the private sector can play as a partner in bringing solutions to scale. The level of investment required to improve urban economic infrastructure and to respond to the enormous demand for adequate housing is beyond the scope of local authorities and associations.

Engaging the private sector is necessary in order to bring public projects and programs to scale. For developing nations, achieving greater urban productivity and mobilizing decent, affordable shelter will require a positive, proactive response to urbanization and the united efforts of both the public and private sectors. The United States will continue to work through public-private partnerships between, as well as, with non-governmental organizations and civil society to foster urban productivity.

The Secretary-General's report stresses that natural population growth and rural-to-urban migration make increasing urbanization and urban growth inevitable. To promote sustainable development, we are working with our development partners to encourage policies that are based on good governance and that are fiscally sound and responsive to the needs of their people, including their rapidly growing urban poor populations. Local and national governments in the developing world must be able to better plan for and manage the challenges of rapid and irrevocable urbanization.

Rapid urbanization is an emerging issue of immense importance, and one that defies simple solutions. It is an especially difficult issue for most bureaucracies to address because in fact it is not a single issue but rather an intersection of many jurisdictions and areas of responsibility – housing, water, sanitation, power, health, employment, pollution, crime, education, politics, transportation, loss of agricultural land, and more.

It is also important to recognize that policy interventions must be considered on two levels. First, it is critical to address the current situation faced by the urban poor in existing slum communities. Equally critical, however, is to consider ways to prevent future slums from forming. With developing countries adding nearly two billion additional urban dwellers over the next 25 years, there is potential for explosive growth in slum populations. The United States believes this will be one of the most significant development issues in the coming decades.

Finally, regarding the Secretary-General's third report on the flow of financial resources for the implementation of the ICPD program of action, we believe this is a useful examination of donor and domestic expenditures on population activities. We note that donor assistance may reach \$10.8 billion and that expenditures by developing countries may reach \$27 billion this year.

The United States is pleased to contribute to this trend of increasing donor assistance. In 2008, the United States will contribute approximately \$457 million in bilateral assistance for family planning and reproductive health care, up from \$436 million in 2007. In addition, the United States has contributed \$18.8 billion since 2003 to fight HIV/AIDS through the President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), including \$6 billion in 2008 alone.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, my delegation would like to stress that the United States is committed to working in partnership with local and national governments, communities, civil society, the private sector, and donors to tackle the complex challenges associated with rapid urban growth in the developing world and in countries with economies in transition. Thank you very much for the opportunity to share our views. We look forward to fruitful discussions during this Session.