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*Agenda item 5: General debate on the contribution of population and development issues to the theme of the annual ministerial review in 2012*

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**KEY MESSAGE**

**In the light of the demographic challenges facing the Asia-Pacific region, a people-focused policy agenda is critical for building sustainable and inclusive societies. Within such an agenda, youth, adolescents and older persons must be at the heart of policy developments. To better cater for the poor and other vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, their families, and migrants, economic growth must be shared more equitably, universal social protection should be realized, and labour markets must become more inclusive.**

Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Asia-Pacific region continues to be a high performer in many respects. At the aggregate level, economic growth figures remain impressive despite the economic downturn. In terms of the MDGs, several of the targets have already been met or are within reach. However, there is substantial variation both within and across countries in the region.

Still, almost two billion people have no access to basic sanitation and around 500 million people are living without safe drinking water.

Almost one billion people live on less than 1.25 dollar a day and projections suggest that the number of poor will increase as a result of the global economic crisis and the lack of well-developed domestic consumer markets and social protection systems.

Informal employment accounts for a majority of all employment in developing Asia and these workers generally occupy low-paid, low-productive and hazardous jobs with no or very limited access to social protection. As a result, around two-fifths of all workers in the Asia-Pacific region are classified as working poor.

In sum, despite impressive economic growth, income inequalities are widening and universal health-care and basic income-security are only reaching a fraction of those in need.

To build a sustainable future in Asia and the Pacific with more inclusive societies, population development, with a focusing on youth and adolescents must be at the heart of the policy agenda.

Within such an agenda,

- Economic growth must be shared equitably;
- Universal social protection should be realized; and
- Labour markets must become more inclusive.

New growth models should therefore be driven by equitably shared productivity growth and quality jobs, including jobs in the formal sector.

Such a development would improve individual and household income security and thereby reduce the precarious situation many people are facing. Such development would also lay the foundations for more effective tax-benefit systems and make income redistribution across groups and generations possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Youth in the Asia-Pacific region are particularly vulnerable from a socio-economic perspective. While informal employment is more prominent among youth than the general population, youth unemployment rates remain stubbornly high at three to five times the adult population.

To address, these challenges, attention needs to be directed to developing better youth policies focusing on knowledge and skills, including life-long learning. In particular, education and training systems need to better match modern demands in the labour market to facilitate school to work transitions.

In a region with a youth population of 760 million, these challenges should also be placed in the context of the ongoing demographic changes, which are occurring at unprecedented levels. The rapid transition from high fertility rates to generally lower rates means that the number of young people in the Asia-Pacific region has started to fall.

In combination with increasing longevity, projections for the ESCAP region indicate that, over the next 20 years, the population share of persons 60 years and older will almost double. These demographic developments have both positive and negative implications for society.

While a smaller number of children means an opportunity for countries to increase enrollment rates and quality education, which in turn would enhance economic growth, it also has a number of potential negative impacts on society through labour shortages, skills gaps and, inevitably, future economic growth. The impact on societies in the region will depend on how governments decide to utilize its demographic dividend.

In this respect, strengthening intergenerational contracts is a crucial element to better cater for the poor and other vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities and their families, migrants, young and older persons.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next 18 months, ESCAP will respond to some of these challenges by playing a key role in two complimentary activities and partner with United Nations agencies, development institutions and Civil Society Organizations related to population.

First is the regional facilitation of the Global Review of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). In 2014 the world will mark 20 years of implementation of the ICPD. In respect to this General Assembly Resolution 65/234 calls on the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in consultation with Governments and in cooperation with all relevant organizations of the UN system, other relevant international organizations and institutions and experts, to “undertake an operational review of the implementation of the Programme of Action”. It specifies that the review will be based on the “highest-quality data and analysis of the state of population and development” and that it will take into account the “need for a systematic, comprehensive and integrated approach to population and development issues.”

For this purpose, ESCAP is working with UNFPA on facilitating the Global Survey in support of the operational review of ICPD at the Asia-Pacific regional level, through working with Governments to ensure the highest quality data is produced for both the 47th Commission on Population and Development and the United Nations General Assembly Special Session later in 2014.

For the second activity, ESCAP will use the outcomes of the Global Survey at the regional level for the convening of the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference (APPC) in Bangkok in September 2013. The APPC is a decennial conference comprising both a Senior Officials Meeting and a Ministerial Session. The Sixth APPC will provide a timely opportunity to discuss the regional outcomes of the operational review of the Programme of Action of the ICPD, but will also result in a regional Declaration on Population and Development.

Thank you