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Agenda item 4
General Debate on National Experience in Population Matters:
Adolescents and Youths

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Thank you Mr. Chairman.

For far too long, young people have been ignored in national policies and programs. They have been ignored in a period of critical transition between childhood and taking on real adult responsibilities.

Kofi Annan once said that a society that cuts itself off from its youth severs the lifeline; and is condemned to bleed to death.'

Youth and adolescents are a vital part of our societies. Young people around the world must have the opportunity to develop a sense of usefulness, belonging and empowerment. Their roles and their needs must be recognized in national economic development plans.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel is committed to investing in the future of adolescents and youth. Guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Israel views the needs of adolescents and youth in a holistic manner, by ensuring universal health coverage and free education for all citizens until they reach the age of 18, and promoting informal educational activity for positive youth development.

Israel is home to a widely diverse population from many ethnic, religious, cultural, and social backgrounds, from all corners of the world. Therefore, youth-related programs must be adapted to the needs of the different cultures that make up our society.

Young immigrants, just like in any other country, face a double challenge: the common developmental challenge that all adolescents face, compounded by the struggle to adapt to a new society. These challenges can lead young immigrants to perform poorly academically, experience school disengagement or engage in destructive or dangerous behaviors.

To diminish these risks, the Israeli Government provides schools with special funding for each immigrant student, so that they can provide special assistance to students who need it, whether it be academic assistance or social and emotional support. The Government has also created the position of 'cultural mediator' in each school, who can help enhance communication with the

parents of students, who may not be familiar with the school system and who may experience language difficulties.

Mr. Chairman,

At-risk youth in Israel represent about 16% of all 12-17 year olds, with higher percentages in disadvantaged communities. The system of services available to these youth in Israel has undergone major reform in recent years, following the work of a major national commission on youth.

These reforms include the de-centralization of decision-making with respect to the use of budget allocated to at-risk youth, identification of all youth at risk in the community, systematic data-based planning of services by a local inter-organizational forum, and a requirement that each local community is responsible for tracking outcomes for all youth served.

Israeli civil society is also extremely involved in helping at-risk youth become productive citizens. One example is an organization called ELEM, which operates in 40 cities and towns nationwide, with a variety of innovative programs targeted towards different population groups. ELEM reaches out to all populations of troubled youth, including, Israeli-Arabs, the Ultra-Orthodox, young sex offenders, and immigrants from the Former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. ELEM offers preventive care and support via counseling centers, shelters, rehabilitation, online chat and forums, residential and day treatment, and other social services. When youth can't or won't come to ELEM, ELEM comes to them, through its outreach vans, in 22 cities nationwide every night.

A unique example of ELEM's work is their collaboration with the restaurant group Liliyot. Every year, Liliyot restaurant trains and employs high-school dropouts, who receive instruction, supervision and employment for a period of up to a year and half. For the purpose of the initiative, a team-including a full time social worker-is set up to supervise the program participants. The vocational training enables participants to acquire a high demand profession, and equips them with the means necessary to integrate into society.

Another example of civil society involvement with at-youth risk is Ashalim, a project led by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee together with the Government of Israel. It is

devoted to developing new and innovative services for youth at risk in Israel. One major initiative has been the development of special "day centers" for adolescents who have dropped out of school and encounter a range of difficulties. The centers provide troubled boys and girls with an individually-tailored program of treatment, support and educational inputs and helps them get back into normative programs. Ashalim has also developed programs to help schools deal with the needs of youth with school adjustment problems in order to prevent dropout in the first place.

ASHALIM and ELEM, along with many other civil society organizations, have been a powerful voice neglected and abused adolescents in Israel. Together with the Government, many of these organizations have developed services which provide a variety of forms of residential care, therapy and social support for troubled adolescents.

Mr. Chairman,

The challenges youth and adolescents face are similar, but also differ across countries. We can learn a lot from each other by exchanging experience and best practice. Pooling our expertise and resources at the international level will help develop and promote successful policies to support young people.

In this spirit, Israel actively collaborates with other countries in youth-related research in an effort to further deepen and share knowledge for policy development. One example is our participation in the International Network of Child Policy Research Centers consisting of research institutes from around the world, including South Korea, India, South Africa, Ireland, Great Britain, the U.S and others. We are also conducting an important research exchange with China, through the Health Behaviors of School-aged Children international survey of youth.

Youth are also at the center of our international development work. One example can be found in a brand new collaboration between our international agency for development cooperation, MASHAV, and UNAIDS.

In August 2012, the Mount Carmel International Training Center and UNAIDS will organize a three week workshop where participants will learn about techniques and skills of psycho-social care for children and youth affected by HIV and AIDS. Although Israel does not have large

numbers of children affected and/or infected by AIDS, we do have many children who have been affected by trauma and loss and who have been helped to develop coping skills to deal with these situations. The objectives of this workshop are to help participants understand that HIV and AIDS must be seen as a holistic issue from the perspectives of health, education and welfare, and to build resiliency resources in the individual, the family and the community.

Mr. Chairman,

Youth are the backbone of our nations. The future of our societies is in their hands. If we neglect to motivate them, if we avoid teaching them responsibility and goal-setting, we face the risk of a "lost generation", a generation of youth scarred by alienation or despair.

We must reaffirm our pledge to not only actively make young people a priority in our work, but to also commit ourselves to listen to them, and to incorporate their perspectives within our national policies. Their future depends on it.