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URBANIZATION, INTERNAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
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Report of the Secretary-General

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I have the pleasure to introduce the report entitled *World population monitoring, focusing on population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development* (E/CN.9/2008/3).

Urban settlements have been part of human experience for millennia. During most of human history, cities remained rare and had slow growing populations. With the advent of industrialization, the number of cities increased and their population began to grow rapidly. Yet, even by 1920, only 30 per cent of the population in the more developed regions was urban. Accelerated urban growth occurred during the second half of the 20th century, particularly in the developing world, leading to the milestone that we are about to reach: the point where the urban population surpasses the rural population for the first time in history.

The *World Population Monitoring* report provides a rich overview of global and regional trends in urbanization, the growth of cities, the future decline of the rural population and patterns of internal migration. It also discusses the interrelationships of these processes with development. Based on a rich empirical and analytical foundation, the report reviews policy responses and presents a number of policy options.

If past changes in the spatial distribution of the world population are remarkable, the projected future is no less impressive. According to current projections, the world can expect the urban population to increase by 3.1 billion persons by 2050 and most of this growth will be absorbed by the urban areas of the developing world, particularly those in Asia and Africa. That is, urban areas in developing countries will expand over the next four decades by about as many people as those living on Earth in 1960. Whereas the urban population will continue to increase, the rural population will peak at 3.5 billion around 2019 and decline thereafter. Despite the rapid urbanization expected to occur in Africa, Asia and developing Oceania, these three major areas are expected to remain the least urbanized until 2050. In contrast, Latin America and the Caribbean is already among the most urbanized areas of the world, with a proportion urban falling between

Access to basic services, including an improved or protected source of drinking water, an improved sanitation facility and electricity, is markedly lower in the rural areas than in the urban areas of the developing world. Furthermore, in 2005, an estimated 840 million people in developing countries lived in slums.

Rural areas also tend to have less favourable age distributions than urban areas, with high child and old-age dependency levels. They thus face higher relative burdens to educate children and provide decent livelihoods to the rural elderly than do urban areas.

Fertility levels tend to be highest and contraceptive use lowest among rural dwellers, followed by the inhabitants of small cities. In addition, the poor in urban areas tend to exhibit levels of fertility and modern contraceptive use close to those of rural populations. The urban advantage in terms of access to reproductive health and family planning is smaller than would be expected because the urban poor and inhabitants of small cities lack adequate access to those services.

According to almost every measure of child well-being, rural children are disadvantaged in comparison to urban children and, among the latter, the poor fare worse than the better-off.

In view of the above, the report recommends that improvement of service delivery to the urban poor, the inhabitants of small cities and those of rural areas be given priority.

Meeting the needs for family planning of poor urban dwellers and rural inhabitants would help reduce population pressure over the long run.

In order to accommodate future urban growth, local authorities need to plan ahead, especially by providing the urban poor with serviced land to build and improve their own housing. Civil society organizations should be encouraged to collaborate in addressing the problems associated with urban poverty.

To combat rural poverty, efforts need to be made to ensure secure land tenure, improve access to water resources, facilitate and encourage investment to enhance agricultural productivity. Integrated development strategies that capitalize on the interactions between small cities and neighbouring rural localities can provide a framework for the generation of off-farm employment for rural residents.

These and other suggestions are contained in the World Population Monitoring report. They are generally based or expand on practices that Governments have already been implementing. As the report documents, concern about the spatial distribution of the population is widespread among Governments (85 per cent express concern), particularly among those of developing countries. Action at all levels of Government is urgent if authorities are to be proactive in shaping the process of urbanization instead of merely coping with its consequences. Urbanization can be managed in ways that promote its potential benefits. To do so, prompt and sustained action is required.