

COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Contribution by the Chairwoman of the 50th session of the Commission on Population and Development, H.E. Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani, Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations, to a panel discussion on “Bringing the ECOSOC system together”

ECOSOC Integration Segment
New York, 10 May 2017

Presented by Ms. Cristina Popescu,
Diplomatic counsellor within the Permanent Mission of Romania
to the United Nations, and Vice-Chair of the 50th session

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Commission on Population and Development met in its 50th session from 3 to 7 April 2017. This presentation highlights some recurrent themes and key messages from the deliberations of the Commission at its recent session, as they pertain to the main theme of the Council and of its Integration Segment focusing on the eradication of poverty.

I am making this presentation on behalf of H.E. Ambassador Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani of Qatar, Chairwoman of the Commission's 50th session, in my capacity as Vice-Chair.

The original mandate of the Commission on Population and Development derives from the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, which took place in Cairo in 1994.

In a resolution on the Commission's methods of work adopted in 2016, the Economic and Social Council reaffirmed that the Commission's primary mandate is to monitor, review and assess the implementation of the Programme of Action at the national, regional and international levels. At the same time, the Council affirmed that the Commission would contribute to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within its existing mandate.

The Cairo conference in 1994 had underscored the essential linkages between population and development. The Programme of Action emphasized that population, poverty, patterns of production and consumption, and the environment are so closely interconnected that none can be considered in isolation. Eradicating poverty was seen as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

Poverty eradication has been a recurrent topic addressed by the Commission since its earliest days. From the mid-1990s until today, the topic has been addressed in relation to the special theme of the annual session. At its 50th session in 2017, the Commission addressed this topic in the context of its theme on “Changing population age structures and sustainable development”.

The linkages between changes in population age structures and the eradication of poverty were discussed in two reports of the Secretary-General prepared for the recent session, as well as in plenary statements made by Member States, including a series of national voluntary presentations, in the contributions by keynote speakers and expert panellists, and in the discussion of the draft resolution on the special theme.

The 50th session of the Commission on Population and Development emphasized that taking account of changing population age structures as part of development planning is essential for achieving the Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including Goal 1 on ending poverty in all its forms everywhere.

The reports of the Secretary-General documented the changes taking place in the age distribution of human populations. On a global scale, the changes take the form of a gradual shift from a population concentrated in the younger age groups to a population where older persons are just as numerous as, and may even outnumber, children and youth.

The process of population ageing has been driven primarily by a reduction in the global birth rate. A lower birth rate leads initially to a concentration of the population in the working ages, followed eventually by a large but gradual increase in the number of older persons.

The swelling of the working-age population, accompanied by slow or no growth in the number of children and youth, yet before there has been a substantial increase in the size of the older population, is a temporary phenomenon lasting for several decades. Participants in the Commission’s 50th session recognized that during this period there is a window of opportunity for rapid development driven by an accelerated growth in income per capita. The accelerated growth is the result of a favourable balance of workers to dependents, or of producers to consumers, caused primarily by changes in the distribution of the population by age.

In many countries, an accelerated pace of economic growth will be essential for ending poverty. In this regard, the good news is that the expected demographic changes are likely to be favourable toward an acceleration of growth. But this will also require a number of important enabling factors.

Given the anticipated changes in the population age distribution, the reports of the Secretary-General draw attention to a range of policies that can contribute to ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (SDG 1).

For countries with high levels of fertility and youthful populations, the reports point toward policies in line with specific Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda:

- Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services (target 3.7) and reproductive rights (target 5.6),
- Eliminating harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (target 5.3), and
- Expanding investments in human capital through programmes to support education (Goal 4) and health (Goal 3), especially for children and youth.

For countries at intermediate or advanced stages of population ageing, the 50th session drew attention to policies that, while intended for other purposes, may also help to avoid extreme scenarios of population ageing and decline, such as:

- Promoting female labour force participation and productive employment,
- Ensuring access to affordable child-care and parental leave for both mothers and fathers, and
- Facilitating safe, orderly and regular migration and mobility of people (target 10.7).

There were various calls for countries with ageing populations to implement policies to promote the health and well-being of the growing population of older persons, such as:

- Investing in education and health throughout the life course,
- Expanding the coverage of pension systems to ensure a minimum level of income security for all older persons,
- Supporting the continued participation of older persons in the labour force and in society at large, and
- Ensuring the financial sustainability of social security and pension systems.

The gender dimension of these issues was acknowledged in the Commission's recent deliberations. In keeping with SDG target 5.4, there were calls for pension systems to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work when determining eligibility criteria and benefit levels.

During the recent session of the Commission on Population and Development, delegations highlighted the importance of supporting investments in education and health, including for sexual and reproductive health, and of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Such investments are needed to realize fully the potential economic benefits of changing population age structures, known as the "demographic dividend", and to promote sustainable development in general.

There was also broad agreement on the importance of promoting youth employment and participation, and supporting the needs of older persons. Children, adolescents and youth, as well as older persons, were identified as vulnerable age groups that should have priority for attention.

Thank you.