

COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Forty-seventh session

WORLD DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

(E/CN.9/2014/3)

Report of the Secretary-General

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

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It is my pleasure to introduce the report of the Secretary-General entitled “World demographic trends” (E/CN.9/2014/3), which presents an overview of demographic trends over the last twenty years. The report is based on data drawn from a number of unique databases developed and maintained by the Population Division of the UN’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to highlight some of the main points in the report.

In 1994, when the international community met in Cairo for the International Conference on Population and Development, an estimated 5.7 billion people lived on the planet. At that time, the world’s population was growing by roughly 87 million people a year, so that by 2014 it was expected that there would be 7.4 billion people in the world. That projection proved to be remarkably accurate: today, the actual number of people living on the planet is roughly 7.2 billion people. Looking toward the future, policymakers should plan for a world that is

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considerably more populated than it is today. On its current trajectory, the world's population is expected to reach 8.1 billion in 2025 and 9.6 billion in 2050.

The story of global demographic change is, however, not simply a story about continued population increase. As the Secretary-General's report points out, the world is characterized by considerable demographic diversity with respect to both the size and structure of different countries' populations and with respect to what is projected for the future. By 2050, for example, the population of Africa is expected to be growing at a rate 15 times faster than the population of Asia, while the population of Europe is expected to be contracting by mid-century.

Much of the difference in projected future population trajectories can be explained by differences in projected fertility in different regions of the world. In 1994, when the international community met in Cairo, total fertility for the world had already fallen to around 3 children per woman, down from around 4.5 children per woman in the 1970s. After the 1994 Cairo conference, fertility continued to fall in most regions, with the notable exception of Europe, where fertility levels were, on average, already below the replacement level. In Africa, the declines started from a higher initial value and have been slower than elsewhere, so that in 2014 the level of fertility in this region remains considerably higher than in all other parts of the world.

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Equally noteworthy, patterns of marriage and union formation have changed over the last 20 years. One example is changes that have taken place in the age of first marriage or union formation, which historically has been a key determinant of when a woman begins to have children. In addition, policies to increase the availability of safe and effective contraceptives, and accessibility to family

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planning programmes and reproductive health care, have expanded and have been instrumental in facilitating reductions in fertility. Globally contraceptive prevalence has continued to increase. However it remains low in countries with high fertility, most of which are in sub-Saharan Africa.

Distinguished delegates,

Another significant difference between the world today and the world twenty years ago has to do with changes in life expectancy. Better hygiene, improvements in living standards, better nutrition, and improvements in access to and quality of medical services, including antibiotics and vaccines, have helped accelerate the mortality decline. In the 20 years since the Cairo conference, life expectancy has increased worldwide by more than 5 years, thanks in large part to considerable progress in reducing child mortality. Worldwide, under-5 mortality has fallen by 40 per cent over the last twenty years, from 86 to 52 deaths per 1,000 live births. Over the same period, the number of maternal deaths that occur each year worldwide was reduced by around half.

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Despite these achievements, there is still a large gap in life expectancy between countries in the developing regions versus those in the developed regions. The gap is particularly pronounced for the group of least developed countries in part because many have been disproportionately affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, in addition to carrying a heavy burden of illness from malaria, tuberculosis and other communicable diseases. Despite significant improvements in life expectancy over the past 20 years, most countries will fail to achieve the goals for mortality improvement that were spelled out in the Programme of Action.

In addition to fertility and mortality, the last major component of population change is migration. As discussed during last year's Commission, international migration has increased in size, scope, complexity and demographic significance over the past 20 years. Since 1990, international migration flows have become increasingly diverse, and some countries are now simultaneously countries of origin, destination and transit. In 2013, the number of international migrants worldwide reached 232 million, up from 154 million in 1990. Although this number represents an increase of 78 million people, the share of international migrants in the world population increased only slightly, from 2.9 per cent in 1990 to 3.2 per cent in 2013.

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Mr. Chairman,

The changes in fertility, mortality, and migration described above combine to shape the structure of the world's population. For example, although global fertility levels are expected to continue to decline, the youthful age structure of the less developed regions ensures that there will be record numbers of young people until 2035, particularly in Africa. The extent to which the occurrence of an unusually large cohort of young persons represents a window of opportunity for African countries will depend in large part on the quality of education that these young people receive and on the ability of the labour market to absorb an unusually large number of new workers.

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Equally significantly, the population of the world is becoming older. Population ageing is inevitable when people live longer and choose to have fewer children. Population ageing poses many challenges to the health care sector as well as to the financial sustainability of pension systems that rely on the

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redistribution of earning from the working-age population to the older generation. Although most advanced in Europe, Japan and North America, population ageing is occurring, or will soon begin, in all areas of the world. By 2050, one in five of the world's population will be over the age of 60.

Mr. Chairman,

In addition to changes in the size, growth rate, and structure of the world's population, the world is also changing in other ways. For example, the world is more urbanized than it was twenty years ago. Today, more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas, and the challenges associated with planning and managing urban areas have increased in both scope and complexity. Globally, the world's urban population increased from 2.3 billion in 1994 to 3.9 billion in 2014, and it is projected to grow to 6.3 billion by 2050. By comparison, the size of the world's rural population has remained basically unchanged since Cairo and is projected to contract in the future, so that in 2050 there could be 300 million fewer rural inhabitants than there are today.

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The landscape of urbanization has also been changing. Megacities, defined as large urban agglomerations of 10 million inhabitants or more, have become both more numerous and considerably larger in size. In 2014, one in ten of the world's population resides in a city of 10 million inhabitants or more.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, the current demographic picture is one of considerable diversity and ongoing change, reflected in new patterns of childbearing, marriage, mortality, migration, urbanization and ageing. The

continuation and consequences of these population trends present unique opportunities as well as challenges for all societies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.