



Fiftieth Session of the Commission on Population and Development

Statement by

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Mr. Chairperson,

Demographic transition is a universal phenomenon, even though its timing and speed have varied greatly across countries and regions. A large majority of the countries are experiencing significant shifts in the distribution of their populations by age, moving from youthful populations towards older populations.

Mr. Chairperson,

Sri Lanka is currently experiencing a 'demographic bulge' with a significantly larger working-age population than children and elderly. However, the dividend from this 'demographic bonus' will not be available for a long period of time as the percentage of those between age 15 and 29 is currently declining. Research suggests that Sri Lanka's ageing population will peak by 2041, at which time Sri Lankans will be the oldest population in South Asia. In other words, by 2041, one out of every four people is expected to be an elderly person.

This will present significant social protection challenges for the country.

Mr. Chairperson,

Compared to many other countries, elderly Sri Lankans work longer and earn labor income. It is also interesting to note that the total income of persons age 22 to 56 remains higher than their total consumption. We had seen that currently a substantial addition of 'initial youth entrants' to the labor force. This youth group has been exposed to technological and academic education. This is an advantage that Sri Lanka has over many countries.

Mr. Chairperson,

Sri Lanka is a country that has traditionally placed high emphasis on social welfare. Since independence, for the past 7 decades, free education and health was provided to all Sri Lankans by the Government. The Government is of the view that these free services are the 'change agents', which led towards the current demographic transition, and formulation of an efficient and viable social security system and a retirement benefits facility targeting the aging population is the need of this hour. These would give an effective operational capability to achieve the declared goals of the social security schemes and the identified sustainable development goals. Such mechanism will provide a security net to cover all the social security expectant individuals.

Sri Lanka has currently implemented State sponsored targeted welfare program to support the poorest strata of the population called *samurdi*. The Government also undertakes to continue the disability and relief payment schemes which were targeted the poor. However, until recent years, farmers, fishermen and the self-employed who constituted the larger proportion of the employed in the labor force were not covered by any social security scheme or pension benefit scheme. In response, the Government commenced a Self Employed Pension and the Social Security Benefits Scheme, for the self-employed and informal sector

workers. A Public Service Provident Fund was established in Sri Lanka in 1942 to cover certain categories of public servants who did not benefit from the Government pension schemes. Currently, the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) and the Employees Trust Fund (ETF) provide the needed social security for retired private sector workers. The Government is working to expand schemes to provide adequate security to elderly population in Sri Lanka.

One of the key challenges in this regard is Sri Lanka's large informal sector of employment. As you are aware, the probability of being employed in informal work decreases significantly with age.

The second key challenge is the low female labor force participation and high youth unemployment rates. Even though Sri Lanka is currently experiencing a large workforce only 56 percent of this working age population is employed – a result of low participation and high unemployment rates among women and youth.

Mr. Chairperson,

Sri Lanka is currently planning the strategies in implementing the SDGs. It has given foremost importance to integrate ageing issues across all elements of national development planning, whether in transport or housing, labour or health care. This would be in line with the core principle of the 2030 Agenda; Leaving no one behind and focusing on SDG 3 :*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.*

A High Level Steering Committee located within the Prime Minister's office is currently engaging directly with Government ministries to guide and provide policy advice and technical support on policy formulation in this regard. In addition, it will function as an accountability mechanism on policy implementation and outcomes. In 2016, Sri Lanka facilitated the first generation

to generation dialogue (G2G) on the country's demographic shifts and its implications for policy making.

Mr. Chairperson,

The change in population ageing structures and aging population is an unavoidable demographic issue in the latter period of the demographic transition. Climate change, urbanization and migration will add additional burdens to this issue. In this scenario, all of us have to be prepared to embrace this reality and take appropriate action through Sustainable Development to address this issue, rather than wait until it is too late.

I thank you Mr. Chairperson.