

UNITED NATIONS



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MR. WU HONGBO
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS,

Opening Remarks
50th Session of the Commission on Population and Development
New York, 3 April 2017

Madame Chairperson,
Ms. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General,
Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The world has witnessed nothing less than a demographic revolution since 1947, when the Population Commission convened its first session. Over the last seven decades we have witnessed a substantial increase in the size of the world's population and dramatic shifts in its distribution, both by age and by place of residence. At the same time, the world has seen a remarkable rise in life expectancy and a drop in the birth rate that have transformed the lives of women and men throughout the world.

Informed by these global trends, population policies have evolved over the years.

In the early years of this Commission, the debate was dominated by a widespread concern over rapid population growth. The gloomy scenario of a global population that would outstrip the capacity for food production, leading inevitably to massive famine, disease and starvation, was famously captured in a best-selling book by Professor Paul Ehrlich, entitled *The Population Bomb*.

During the 1980s and the 1990s, the debate shifted from a top-down focus on fertility reduction for sake of population control to a bottom-up focus on human rights and individual well-being. Thus, the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development provided a more positive and inclusive approach towards the needs, aspirations and rights of individuals than had been seen in previous meetings.

Today, as population growth has slowed or even come to a halt in many countries, the debate over population issues is shifting once again. Population ageing and population decline have now become key issues for a growing number of Member States. With fertility at, or even below, the replacement level, international migration is becoming the main driver of population change for a number of countries.

In 2018, the General Assembly will convene an intergovernmental conference on international migration for adopting a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. I was pleased to learn that this Commission may choose as its theme for its session in 2018 “Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration”. I trust that this Commission, with its unique focus on population dynamics and their relation to development, will contribute to this crucial event.

Dear delegates,

The shifting context of population policies is reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Two of the population megatrends — international migration and urbanisation — were absent from the Millennium Development Goals but are firmly anchored in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Global population trends are well illustrated in the Population Division’s biennial revision of population estimates and projections. These data are presented in the *World Population Prospects*, which is one of the most important publications of my Department. Using such data, governments can anticipate major shifts in population and implement smart policies that respond to demographic realities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This Commission, in all of its previous 49 sessions, has considered the latest demographic trends for the world, analysed their causes and implications, and hosted a debate on policy responses. Working in this way, the Commission has provided invaluable guidance to Member States.

At the same time, the Commission must adjust to changing circumstances. All functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, including the Commission on Population and Development, are expected to adjust their work programmes to contribute to the follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals. Given its areas of expertise, I believe that this Commission has much to contribute to the annual sessions of the High-level Political Forum.

In closing, let me wish you success in this 50th session of the Commission.

Thank you.
