

## ANNUAL MINISTERIAL REVIEW

### GENERAL DEBATE

*Statement by H.E. Ivan Piperkov  
Chair of the Forty-first Session of the  
Commission on Population and Development*

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Mr. President, excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentleman,

I have the pleasure to address you today in my capacity as Chair of the forty-first session of the Commission on Population and Development, which last April focused on the development aspects of population distribution. Since 1946, when the Population Commission was established, it has been focusing on issues that are fundamental for the attainment of sustainable development. In the 1960s, the Commission played a crucial role in making Governments aware of the challenges posed by rapid population growth and in garnering their commitment to take the measures needed to slow population growth. As a result, the rate of population growth dropped from 2 per cent in the late 1960s to 1.3 per cent today. However, the world population is still expected to increase by 2.5 billion people over the next four decades, a figure equivalent to the whole population of Earth in 1950. Furthermore, expected population increases may turn out to be larger if fertility levels remain high in low-income countries.

Indeed, the Commission has underscored that, despite the achievements made so far, there is no room for complacency. Population is still increasing very fast in the least developed countries and is expected to double by 2040. High fertility persists in many of

the least developed countries with fragile environments. Their Governments are already having difficulty coping with the stresses associated with past population growth. Countries where the majority of the population still lives in rural areas are heavily concentrated in the low-income category. In all of them, the continuation of rapid population growth threatens the sustainability of rural development.

In countries where women still have, on average, five children or more, surveys invariably find that their desired number of children is lower. There are many examples of Governments that, capitalizing on this discrepancy, have developed culturally sensitive policies to provide their citizens with the information and means to realize their desired family size. Given the necessary commitment, Governments can achieve impressive results. The Islamic Republic of Iran, for instance, achieved one of the most rapid reductions in fertility, with the number of children per woman dropping by two-thirds in scarcely 25 years, from six and a half children in the late 1970s to just over 2 today. Providing access to safe and effective methods of family planning is a key component of policies that have produced such rapid reductions.

Mr. Chairman,

The Commission on Population and Development has also stressed the importance of combating disparities within countries. Generally, rural populations have higher fertility than urban populations and less access to services, including education, sanitation, health and family planning. In addition, within urban areas, the poor do not

have as ready access to services as urban dwellers that are better off. Reducing such inequities is not only a matter of fairness and equality of rights, it is also a smart policy to improve human capital and reduce the incentives to have more children. Even in low-income countries, reductions in child mortality and improvements in access to education have prompted parents to have fewer children and invest more on each. It is therefore particularly important to support the efforts of the least developed countries to reach the Millennium Development Goals and to prevent the detrimental effects on child health that the global food crises may cause.

Let me emphasize that efforts to slow population growth, reduce poverty, improve environmental protection and reduce unsustainable consumption and production patterns are mutually reinforcing. Slowing population growth can buy time to adjust and address existing challenges, as the experience of many countries has proven.

Countries lagging behind in the transition to low fertility have no time to lose. Population factors and population policies need to be integrated into their national sustainable development strategies bearing in mind that the success of population education and family planning programmes in a variety of settings demonstrates that informed individuals can and will act responsibly in light of their own needs and those of their families and communities.

Mr. Chairman,

The end of the so-called "population problem" cannot be taken for granted. Without further efforts to reduce fertility, an additional five billion people may live on Earth by 2050 and the world population could more than double by century's end. We have proof that our planet is already under stress. Clearly, to achieve sustainability, population growth cannot continue indefinitely. Fortunately, we have the experience and the means to make the changes needed. Let us, therefore, recommit ourselves to make them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.