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## **Forty-Second Session of the Commission on Population and Development UN Commission on Population and Development**

The contribution of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development to the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals

### **Statement submitted by the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population IUSSP**

April 1, 2009

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population [IUSSP] is pleased to have the opportunity to address this session of the Commission.

The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP), with over 2,400 members and student associates from 134 countries, is the largest international professional association for population specialists. The IUSSP is internationally recognized for its role in identifying emerging and critical population and development issues and encouraging scientific research on these topics. Since 1928, the IUSSP has convened international conferences and specialized meetings to advance population research and raise awareness of population issues among governments, policymakers, and the public.

Today, the world is more demographically diverse than perhaps at any other point in time. National fertility ranges from 1.2 to well over 6 births per woman and life expectancy from about 40 to 80 years. Many industrialised countries have fertility well below replacement level and face the prospect of long term decline in population size combined with population ageing. At the other extreme are many poor countries where fertility remains high and whose populations are set to double or even treble in size between now and mi-century. In between are a large group of countries---mainly in Asia and Latin America—where fertility has declined appreciably but where population growth, particularly in the working and reproductive ages, continues.

Each of these three demographic scenarios presents opportunities and problems. For the low fertility countries, some of the obvious priorities are to make parenthood and

employment more compatible, to encourage people to work longer and to promote international migration policies that benefit both sending and receiving countries, though the latter is difficult to achieve in the midst of a global recession.

For the middle group of countries, where demographic transition is well advanced, a key priority is to stimulate employment so that the potential 'demographic dividend' of a favourable ratio of workers to dependents can be realised. A further priority is to address the very large fertility differences between rich and poor, educated and uneducated that serve to entrench income inequalities. Research by demographers has shown clearly that children from large families are less well nourished and less well educated than their counterparts---in other words their human capital is impaired. Prospective studies have revealed that households with large numbers of children are more likely to fall below the poverty line and less likely to subsequently escape from poverty than other households.

Some economists believe that poor parents want or need large numbers of children but an important recent paper in the Bulletin of the World Health Organization has confirmed that a large part of rich-poor gap in childbearing stems from unintended and unwanted births among the poor. In Nepal, Philippines, Bolivia, Colombia, Haiti and Peru, for instance, recent survey evidence shows that the average woman in the poorest fifth of the population will bear 2 or more unwanted births. The corresponding figure for the richest quintile is half a birth, on average. This is a huge difference that underscores continuing problems of access to contraception among the most disadvantaged.

The main concern of this meeting is the poorest countries. Of the 76 poorest nations (with a population size of 5 million or more) 32, or about half, have population growth rates of 2% pa or more, fertility rates typically of about 5 births per woman and age structures in which 40-50% of the population is under age 15. Surveys also show that unmet need for contraception is high in these 32 countries, typically above 20%. Most of these countries are in sub-Saharan Africa.

The paper by the Secretary-General tabled at this meeting clearly spells out the serious implications of these population features for achievement of nearly all MDGs. Future prospects for countries with fragile eco-systems, such as the Sahelian states, are truly alarming. For decades population growth in Africa has outstripped increase in food production and, according to the 2005 Commission for Africa Report, Africa was importing \$20 billion of food per year at the start of this century. Continued rapid population growth makes the elimination of hunger and achievement of food security a huge challenge. Also of concern is the conclusion of several demographers that fertility decline in Africa has faltered in the past decade and in some countries petered out altogether. In West Africa modern method use among married women remains below 10% with few exceptions. It is surely time that these issues are faced and debated honestly. The concepts of reproductive rights and health are fine but they are not a substitute for priority-setting based on a correct understanding of the importance of population trends for development. There need be no conflict between

an economic-demographic rationale for greater investment in family planning and a rights-health rationale because the countries with the most severe population problems are also characterised by high unmet need. Nor should it be forgotten that mass uptake of contraception represents a huge stride towards the emancipation of women. As Margaret Sanger said many decades ago 'No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body'.

Finally, I would like to bring to your attention that the IUSSP is holding an international population conference later this year, at which these and many more population matters will be analysed and debated. The venue is Marrakech---the first time the Union has held its four-yearly conference in Africa--- and the dates are September 27 to October 2. For more information please go to the Conference website at <http://iussp.org/marrakech2009> . I hope that many of you will be able to attend because it presents a rare opportunity to discuss issues of extreme import to the future of the planet.