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Statement

by

Yves Berthelot

Executive Secretary

to

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Development

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Mr. Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

The national populations of Europe and North America, with only minor exceptions have completed their secular transitions to low levels of fertility and mortality. Fertility rates in many cases have descended below replacement level and remain there, sometimes widely fluctuating around low average values. Recently, in some countries, fertility has reached unprecedented low levels, levels not seen even during the disruption of two World Wars. Mortality rates have continued to decline in a large number of countries, with gains in survival particularly notable among older people. Many national life expectancies at birth have reached levels considered utopian only a few decades ago. In contrast, a number of countries in central and eastern Europe are displaying very disturbing signs of steady increases in mortality among certain population groups. International migration within and toward Europe and North America, the major receiving areas of the world, has gained in intensity and complexity as a result of the political change in central and eastern Europe at the turn of the decade. Over the last few years these parts of Europe have become areas of intense movements across international borders.

These highly varied trends in fertility, mortality and international migration exert major influences on population growth, age structure, and the ethnic or minority composition of the national populations. Slow growth has been the norm in Europe and North America

over the past few decades, but more recently it has been superseded by a sharp population decline in a number of central and east European countries, the so-called countries with economies in transition. This new trend, which could not be anticipated only a few years ago, is a consequence of steep drops in fertility and in some instances, associated increases in mortality. The secular decline in fertility, coupled with recent sub-replacement fertility rates and gains in old-age survival in many countries, sustain population ageing, which has been under way in this part of the world for nearly a century. Partly in response to slow growth and ageing of the labour force, western countries of the region have attracted foreign workers and their family members of diverse cultural backgrounds, bringing about in many instances multicultural societies with immigrant populations living along side but not necessarily mixing with host populations. The receiving countries increasingly realize that immigration is only a palliative for slow population growth and ageing.

Clearly, population issues and policy challenges in Europe and North America, are fundamentally different from those of the developing world. No matter how serious they may appear to Governments of these countries, they are less daunting than the ones confronted by the developing nations. The population issues and challenges in this region, however, are more acute than many believe and they commend the focused attention of policy makers.

1. Sub-replacement fertility, family change and contraception

Sub-replacement fertility, the norm of these societies, will shortly lead to a population decline in an increasing number of countries of the western part of the region. A growing number of countries in the eastern part are already seeing their populations decline. For some densely-

populated western countries population decline per se is not an alarming development today, but it is a highly disturbing sign to Governments of countries with economies in transition. They correctly perceive population decline as a strong indication of a society in crisis, compounded by the hardship of moving toward a market economy and parliamentary democracy.

Excessively low fertility tells us indirectly about conditions under which individuals enter into unions and bear and raise children. The near collapse of marriage and fertility rates in so many countries with economies in transition in the last few years strongly suggests that the social and economic dislocation associated with the transition makes it extremely difficult for young people to marry and have children. In the rest of the region the picture is less clear. If the social and policy contexts of union formation and childbearing in southern Europe were compared with those in the Nordic countries, one might surmise that, in large measure, excessively low fertility in southern Europe is a consequence of a family-unfriendly environment. The challenge, therefore, is to strive for social policies and a family-friendly environment that would enable young people, like their parents and grandparents, to begin families when they wish and have the number of children they desire. This challenge is greatest in countries with economies in transition, which are experiencing the highest levels of social and economic dislocation.

The transition to a small family has been achieved in many central and east European countries by methods that a large proportion of couples in the West and many couples in developing countries abandoned decades ago -- traditional contraceptives and induced abortion. Until the beginning of the decade, the present-day countries

with economies in transition remained outside the modern family planning movement. Hence, the transition from outdated methods of fertility regulation to modern methods is one of the biggest challenges these countries face in the near future. Making modern family planning services widely available in this part of Europe is of highest priority so that excessive rates of contraceptive failure and induced abortion can be quickly reduced along with the associated excess of maternal mortality, and poor reproductive health. Induced abortion should cease to be a primary method of fertility regulation, a status it should never have attained in the first place.

2. Population ageing, older people and health

Sub-replacement fertility is the cause of rapid and accelerating population ageing in the region, a phenomenon which can be retarded and possibly reversed in the long run only by an increase in aggregate fertility. Should sub-replacement fertility continue into the future, a likely development, the age distribution of many national populations in this region will take on a shape never seen in the history of humankind. What used to be an age pyramid before may evolve into an age urn, with a very high proportion of older people. This unprecedented population age structure will pose policy and other challenges with which no society has had any long-term experience. It is, therefore, essential that in the coming year, before the full impact of population ageing is felt, policies be put in place that will accommodate this unique demographic development.

Over the past ten years improvements in health and survival, particularly among adult and older persons have been greater in countries with market economies than many observers could have anticipated. As the average life span is extended and new years of

healthy life expectancy are added, it becomes natural that these societies view older people as a resource rather than a burden. The elderly should remain economically active longer than their peers of a decade or two ago by raising the mandatory retirement age and introducing flexible working arrangements. This will be one of many, often complementary ways of ensuring that old-age security schemes and health-care programmes for the elderly remain financially sound. Other possible policy changes include modifications in public pension entitlements and innovative alternatives to the omnipresent pay-as-you-go public pension schemes, such as private pension programmes and individual retirement plans.

In countries with economies in transition, statistics suggest limited gains in health and survival over the last ten years at levels of mortality that were considerably higher than elsewhere in the region. Moreover, a number of these countries have experienced a rise in mortality among selected population groups, particularly among male adults, through much of the 1980s and have seen even sharper mortality increases after the onset of transition to market economy. Levels of life expectancy at birth are astonishingly low in some of these countries. For example, male life expectancy at birth in Russia fell to 59 years in 1993, the level observed in many Asian and Latin American countries. In spite of these trends, populations of these countries continue to age as a consequence of low fertility, the prime factor of ageing.

These mortality trends are a testimony to the severe stress central and east European societies are experiencing. In particular, they suggest that falling living standards, unhealthy life styles and poor diets are taking their toll. Moreover, they indicate that the

health systems of these countries, which always lagged behind those in the West are rapidly deteriorating. The immense challenge of arresting and reversing these trends must be met when policies and programmes to accommodate continuing ageing are implemented.

One must also recognize that no matter how long our lives are extended, a stage is reached in many a person's life where one form of support or another, such as long-term care, becomes indispensable. Experience shows that institutionalizing old people in need of day- to day support is costly and that with continuing population ageing, increasing institutionalization of the old old cannot be sustained. Therefore, all European and North American countries will face challenges of balancing family-, community- and institution based forms of support for the elderly.

3. International migration and foreign populations

Countries of Europe and North America have experienced surges in intentional migration during the past ten years and are increasingly faced with the task of bringing migration flows under control. Flows of illegal migrants, asylum seekers and refugees toward traditional receiving countries in the West have been on the rise, especially since 1989, the year of the onset of political change in central and eastern Europe. Within this part of Europe, new forms of migration, unknown until then have emerged, particularly as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Wars within and between newly created states have caused massive forced population movements, creating the greatest humanitarian crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

Countries of the region remain committed to humanitarian pr

principles underlying the institution of asylum, family reunification. and assistance to refugees and internally displaced populations. They remain committed to the respect of rights of migrants and minority populations and to extending the protection to vulnerable migrant groups, such as undocumented migrants. At the same time they are seeking to control their borders and exercise their right to decide on whom to give access to their territory. Moreover, they are committed to bilateral and multilateral efforts within and beyond the region which are designed to tackle the root causes of uncontrolled population movements by means of preventive diplomacy and stronger investment and trade links.

The cultural make-up of European and North American immigrant-receiving societies has been altered as a result of the arrival of migrants and their families from different corners of the globe. Views of the Governments in North America and in Europe generally differ as to whether or not the growing multiculturalism of their societies is desirable or not, with European Governments being less certain about the value of multiculturalism. This is not likely to change and European nations, now including those in central Europe and further to the east will have to find solutions to their outstanding problems of less than full integration of their foreign populations, including their relatively low levels of naturalization. Successful integration may, however, require reducing immigration levels.

4. Assistance to countries with economies in transition

Let me now turn to international population assistance and restrict myself to challenges to this assistance within the European and North America region.

The countries with economies in transition have inherited many problems from Governments replaced during 1989-1991. The transition to a market economy and parliamentary democracy along with the hostilities and wars that erupted in several successor states of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia have exacerbated those problems. Never in this century have countries in this part of the world simultaneously witnessed such complex and grave problems. These problems pose immense challenges to the new democratically-elected Governments and tax to the limit the solidarity and inventiveness of the international community.

A number of population-related issues experienced by the majority of these countries were identified soon after the change of regimes. However, new Governments did not have resources to tackle them and the intentional community was not ready to offer assistance and expertise. A year and a half ago, the European Population Conference, which was held in preparation for this Conference asked the Governments of Europe and North America to start, as a matter of urgency, to help countries with economies in transition in the field of population issues. The level of assistance so far has been pitifully low.

I, therefore, call on this Conference to rise to the occasion and send a clear and strong signal to the international community, particularly to donor Governments in Europe and North America to substantially increase population assistance to central and east European nations. Let me be very clear that this assistance should not be extended at the cost of developing countries, especially those with highly complex population problems. Moreover, this assistance should be of a short-term nature and should cease as soon as the population issues it addresses are resolved.

There are many programme areas in which international assistance can be particularly effective. I will mention just two. One is the field of data collection, analysis, and policy advice, which should be promoted in order to help these countries better understand their demographic issues and seek appropriate solutions to them. The other area is that of active promotion and development of reproductive health services centered on modern family planning programmes that can, in a matter of years, free the women of this region from the hardship of repeated contraceptive failures and induced abortions. My organization stands ready to participate, hand in hand with the United Nations Population Fund and with other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, in bringing the fruits of modern population programmes to this part of Europe.

Thank you.

For further information, please contact: popin@undp.org
POPIN Gopher site: <gopher://gopher.undp.org/11/ungophers/popin>
POPIN WWW site: <http://www.undp.org/popin>