

POPULATION MOVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates.

I am most honoured to have been asked to address this Asian Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the organizers of the Conference, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, for their excellent preparatory work and for the arrangements at this meeting. May I also express my gratitude to our hosts, the Government of the People's Republic of China, for providing a forum and in other ways making possible this examination of one of Asia's most urgent problems: the impact of population growth and distribution on the development process.

The soaring growth of Asia's populations, already badly straining the resources of the countries of this continent and enlarging the scale of their problems, has increasingly come to be one of the central concerns of policy-makers and development planners of this region. Some 60 per cent of the two billion increase in global population over the last three decades occurred here in Asia. The future is equally disquieting. Despite remarkable success in some countries in reducing fertility rates, a number of the most populous low-income countries are expected to double their population in the next 35 years. By the dawn of the 21st century -- now less than two decades away -- Asia will have

one billion more people. Finding food and gainful employment for these additional masses of people is bound to strain to the utmost limits the capacities of countries all over Asia, whatever their political, social or cultural systems.

Most governments of Asia have recognized that continued development requires that they stabilize their populations as soon as possible and have adopted policies aimed at curbing population growth. While these policies vary, virtually all aim at reducing fertility rates through family planning programmes. As Dr. Concepcion points out in her very informative paper, some nine out of ten Asians now live in a country which offers family planning services.

A major concern of family planning programmes has focused on how to extend and improve delivery of current means of fertility control -- contraceptives and up-to-date information on family planning -- to the rural and urban poor. It is widely recognized that delivery services must involve community participation and community responsibility if they are to be effectively established and maintained.

A linked consideration has been in improving access of the poor to health services. The lowered infant mortality rates which result from improved health services, it is now recognized, can reduce the motivation to have large families. Particularly in the rural areas, where children play an essential role in family work, having many children in order that the few will survive is seen as an "investment" under conditions where health services are poor or non-existent.

It is also becoming clear that in most Asian countries population policies must be implemented within the context of pluralistic societies

containing a mix of different ethnic, cultural or religious groups. It is important that these policies seek to allay the fears that one group's commitment to fertility reduction might place it in the long run in a disadvantageous situation vis-a-vis other groups. Very fragile and sensitive ethnic or religious balances should not be upset as a result of population policies. It is therefore essential that all groups should be encouraged to commit equally themselves to the goals of reducing population growth.

Fertility and mortality, of course, are but two of the many important variables controlling population growth. There now appears to be emerging consensus among demographers and other population researchers that proper development -- when it provides more education and employment improves the status of women, and brings about more equitable income distribution -- may powerfully affect decisions on family size. Thus one can see a possible cyclical chain of cause and effect, where policies that stimulate development in turn stimulate population stability which itself is a condition of further development. The problem is that very little is known, in any precise manner, about just how much these various forces push and pull each other, or in what groups or locations they have the most impact. Further research in this area could greatly help policy-makers reach more effective decisions in shaping population and development policies.

Increasing attention is being paid to the ways in which population growth or reduction are related to social and cultural dynamics. Here migration and population movements are extremely important and I propose to say a few words about this particular dimension of population studies

and policies. Yet while we know that many millions are on the move -- both within countries and across national and even continental boundaries in Asia and around the globe we have very inadequate knowledge of why they move and what impact, in the short and in the longer run, these immense flows have on the areas they leave behind and the areas they move to. This is, in fact, one of the most serious and little understood aspects of the population problems that will confront us in the next few decades in addition to fertility reduction.

Migration is an appropriate topic at this Beijing forum, for large-scale movements of people form the very warp and woof of much of China's history. The resettlement of vast numbers of people, either planned or in response to invasion or natural disaster, has been a preoccupation of Chinese governments for thousands of years. Indeed, China offers us a number of examples of how, when well-planned and well-executed, resettlement can be a positive force in development.

Large-scale movements of people -- pushed by oppression, war and hardship or pulled by the beckoning of economic opportunity and political freedom -- have characterized much of human history. Europe still bears the record of great invasions of wandering peoples over the centuries, Africa the imprint of the spread of the Bantu people to the south. The United States and much of Latin America are nations of immigrants, and those who greeted the European discoverers of the New World were themselves migrants from somewhere in the Asian hinterlands thousands of years earlier.

But while migrations have been a continuing feature of history, two important aspects of the modern world have sharply altered the

conditions in which today's movements of peoples are occurring. The first has been the establishment of the nation-state and its control of movements across its borders. This raises politically controversial questions about the permanent acceptance of refugees and migrant workers and their political, economic and cultural integration into the receiving societies. Without such assimilation, equally disturbing questions arise about the return of migrants to their homelands, with potentially profound social, economic and cultural consequences for the countries of origin.

The second altered condition is the rapid increase in the numbers of people, with the resultant potential for massive movements at a time when relatively open spaces for new settlements are becoming increasingly scarce. The great European migrations of the 19th and early 20th centuries were to virgin frontiers in North and South America and Australia. No such New World exists today for the wretched, the poor, and the homeless on the move today from Asia and other parts of the Third World.

A further complicating factor is the very imprecise nature of our knowledge about the modern-day movements on which we have had to base migration and population distribution policy. The tools we have to work with in making estimates, chiefly census data, are very blunt instruments and they tell us very little about the complicated interplay of forces that can set people on the move, and the degree to which this affects fertility behaviour. Much of today's migration by its very nature -- as in the case of illegal immigrants, seasonal workers or many of the refugees -- goes largely uncounted and is subject to gross errors of

estimation. There is great need for more refined field studies and the development of innovative research methodologies to improve our understanding of the true dimensions of and the reasons for this vast ebb and flow of people both within nations and across national and continental borders.

On the international level, Asians are contributing to the three major thrusts of modern-day migration -- to Europe, North America, and increasingly in recent years, to the oil-rich countries of the Middle East. Estimates by the United Nations and other agencies suggest that something on the order of 8 to 10 million Asians are now international migrants, mainly as refugees or migrant workers. Refugees may number 5 million or more with their total swelling daily. Migrant workers and their families in the Middle East, from both the Arab countries of Asia as well as increasing numbers from Asian countries farther east, are estimated at 3 million or more, with a projected need for an additional 2 million over the next several years. There are 2 million South Asians in Great Britain alone and others throughout Europe. The flows to the United States and Canada have been smaller, but contain significant numbers of doctors, engineers and other professionals whose skills could be badly missed in their home countries.

However great the international migration figures, they pale in comparison to movements within Asian nations -- chiefly the continuing flight of millions into already overcrowded and unmanageable cities but also from one rural area to another as well as between cities.

Some 690 million Asians now live in urban areas -- more than a three-fold increase since 1950. Not all of this increase, of course,

is the result of migration. Estimates of how much is due to migration, how much to natural increase, vary widely -- studies put migration's share from about one-third to double that proportion. Whatever the true figure, migrants -- often from different cultures, classes and linguistic and ethnic groups -- are highly visible on arrival, and more demanding on most public services than new babies. Everyone welcomes the arrival of a new baby in the neighbourhood -- few the new migrant.

Extrapolating from Asian urban growth figures in only the five-year period 1975-1980, recent migrants in the cities could number anywhere from around 40 to some 80 million. The extreme range emphasizes how acute our lack of knowledge is in this area. But accepting only the lower figure, and adding the international migrants, a staggering picture emerges of a "nation of migrants" among our nations of Asia of some 50 million people, a population larger than all but six Asian countries. While many in this "nation" are undoubtedly better off than before they moved, at least economically, it also contains vast numbers of the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the landless and the frightened.

A long and challenging research agenda faces us when we consider how to develop appropriate policies for dealing with the problems of these millions on the move as well as those they leave behind and those who receive them.

We know very little, for instance, about the impact of either international or internal migration on fertility behaviour. It has been argued that prolonged male absence and improved economic circumstances should work to reduce birth rates. Others counter that improved economic circumstances could be equally conducive to earlier marriage and thus

increase fertility rates. Only a concerted research effort should lead the way out of this conundrum.

We also need to investigate the cultural, social and psychic costs of separation of families, particularly on women. We are largely lacking in knowledge about changes in fertility behaviour when whole families move from the countryside into the cities.

Another area of uncertainty is the question of remittances and their impact on national and local economies as well as what the long-term socio-cultural effects may be of altered consumer spending patterns and other changes in life-style resulting from money sent back home. Increased consumer spending also has an impact on energy use patterns.

The rapid growth of cities everywhere in Asia also raises questions of how fast urbanization should proceed. What rate of urban growth can be supported without overstraining the capabilities of urban infrastructures and making their claim on a country's national resources unrealistic and unacceptable? What is the optimal population distribution patterns for a given region or country? What are the development implications when rural areas, due to population doubling, begin themselves to require urban services and facilities? All of these raise fundamental questions about the limits of urbanization and the appropriate rural-urban population balance on which research is needed.

Closely linked to these questions are considerations of the spatial distribution of human activities which affect transportation flow and thus are tied to questions of energy costs. Their interactions need to be investigated.

It has also been suggested that in certain areas of exceedingly

heavy population density, migration policies may be more effective in slowing population growth than family planning policies. If so, this could have important implications for development policy planners in many countries -- questions of this kind should be investigated.

There are often political and security considerations underlying the planned migration component of a country's development plan -- in, for instance, the decision to move people to border areas or empty spaces or to regions singled out for specific development efforts. At the same time, such population movements -- if into areas with different religious, ethnic or cultural backgrounds -- may lead to social and political tensions and increased security problems. Comparative evaluation studies of efforts made to date, and the reasons for their successes or failures, could provide valuable information for planners and policy-makers.

These suggest just a few of the complex aspects of human migration that need to be investigated and underline the importance of mounting a major research effort to improve our understanding of their interactions. Such an effort will call for a collaborative integrative approach by the governments, universities and research institutions of Asia, as well as international organizations such as the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and others within and without the UN system.

At the United Nations University, we have recently broadened our horizons in an attempt to respond more effectively and more flexibly to the sets of interlocking global problems that now confront humanity. In dealing with such problems, we recognize it is impossible to ignore the linkages between large-scale migrations, population policies and the

over-all development process. We are primarily interested in research that might contribute to solutions of these and other problems, and we have begun to explore the kinds of work in human migration which we could most usefully undertake. I hope that the contacts we are making here with the parliamentarians of Asia will aid us in this and other endeavours. The relationships developed here should be maintained as part of the outreach of the United Nations University and the growing interaction needed between policy-makers and researchers to tackle together the urgent concerns of the global society. Thank you.