



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission for Social Development**

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in achieving poverty eradication, social integration and full employment and decent work for all**

### **Statement submitted by World Information Transfer, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



## Statement

### The “youth bulge”, poverty and security

Poverty eradication has been on the United Nations agenda for decades. Solutions to decreasing poverty have also been on the United Nations agenda with particular attention on the Millennium Development Goals of 2000. Now the expanded population of young people, called the “youth bulge”, has complicated efforts to reduce poverty, increase employment and secure political stability.

Demographic problems and policies cannot be viewed in isolation; instead, policymakers must formulate integrated responses to the interrelated problems of unstable populations, gender inequality, poverty and migration. The youth bulge offers positive potential for economic gains with the right investments and institutions, which is why the developed and developing worlds must work in unison to help balance the global population pyramid.

As the world watched the global population surpass 7 billion people in 2011, demographic concerns and their role as catalysts of global economic, social and political issues garnered greater attention in policy spheres. Despite an expected decline in the average global annual population growth rate to 0.77 per cent over the next half century, world population will continue to climb to 8.9 billion people in 2050.

However, a figure more disconcerting than the projected increase in population is the distribution across the globe, as less developed regions will account for 99 per cent of the expected increment to world population, growing at approximately 58 per cent over the 50-year period. Thus, while Europe experiences a halving of its natural population, Africa’s populace will nearly double, which in turn will further stress the increasingly unstable and unsustainable global demographic landscape. A closer examination of this population explosion indicates that economic, social and political instability are exacerbated by the presence of youth bulges within the population structure, which was most recently visible in the Arab Spring movement.

Overpopulation must be credited as an underlying cause of many of today’s interdisciplinary global issues, such as poverty, resource constraints, gender inequality and social unrest. In developing countries, ranging from Afghanistan to India, excessive population growth has increased pressures on food and water security, physical space and jobs for all; ultimately, population pressure has acted as kindling to the fire of political, religious, ethnic and social tensions. An understated factor in this relationship however is age structure, as very young populations, or youth bulges, embody 62 countries today with two thirds of their populations under the age of 30. These 62 countries are concentrated in the demographic time-bomb regions of the Middle East and Africa, as youth bulges, poverty and poor education and health hinder their development out of the early demographic stage.

Concerns over unbalanced youth bulges extend back to Nazi Germany and Maoist China, as large, disenfranchised youth populations have mixed with a weak economy, environmental stresses and poor governance to produce a dangerous concoction of political violence and social conflict. As countries with more than 60 per cent of the population under the age of three are at least four times more likely than countries with more mature population age structures to experience new outbreaks of civil conflict, population growth and bottom-heavy population

pyramids provide part of the explanation for the arc of instability that extends across Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

For example, Afghanistan is a developing nation with three fourths of its population under the age of 30, and as a combined result of population pressures, economic disparities, political rivalries and ethnic and religious tensions, young Afghans have turned to terrorism and the Taliban for money and stability. Masses of embittered, unemployed youths act as the catalyst, or explosive force, for unrest over political, economic and social conditions in countries such as Pakistan, the Sudan, Somalia and Yemen; this idea is illustrated in the fact that 80 per cent of the world's civil conflicts since the 1970s have occurred in countries with young, fast-growing populations.

A dynamic, increasing youth population acts as a double-edged sword for a nation because while the enlarged working-age population creates the potential for economic growth, this growth is unsustainable due to the sheer number of jobs needed to satisfy the demand for work. A country that is lauded for its demographic and economic dynamism, India, exemplifies this struggle, as the country has the potential for growth rates of 7 to 9 per cent, yet needs to create 40 million jobs by the end of this decade to absorb the massive increase in the labour force. If India fails to create enough jobs for its 600 million young people under the age of 25, the nation may find itself embattled in an Asian Spring, in which millions of unemployed youths seek to overthrow an unresponsive government.

The United Nations has recognized the global nature of these issues, focusing efforts on satisfying the needs of embittered global youth. However, these hollow calls to reduce population in developing countries evoke rhetoric of the past, such as that of United States national security adviser Henry Kissinger, who warned about the youth of the least developed countries becoming volatile, unstable, prone to extremes, alienation and violence with rapid population growth. Developed nations with the wealth and clout to address population instability in the least developed countries tend to tiptoe around the sensitive issue of population reduction, instead centring the population debate on family planning. The demographic landscape of the world is rapidly changing, yet forthright considerations of the population issue continue to be missing from policies ranging from poverty reduction to security.

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