



STATEMENT BY MR. NIRUPAM SEN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE, ON AGENDA ITEM
4: GENERAL DEBATE ON NATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN POPULATION MATTERS:
POPULATION DISTRIBUTION, URBANIZATION, INTERNAL MIGRATION AND
DEVELOPMENT AT THE 41ST SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON POPULATION
DEVELOPMENT ON APRIL 08, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

We congratulate you and other members of the Bureau of the 41st Session of the Commission on Population and Development and assure you of India's support in your conduct of the proceedings of this Commission. My delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary General for the reports that have been prepared for the Commission and also to distinguished keynote speakers who have made excellent presentations in the course of the Conference.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the Group of 77.

Mr Chairman,

Urbanization has been described as a transformative process in economics and demography. It happens when the driver of economic growth moves from agriculture towards industry and services. The decline of agriculture, relative to manufacturing and services, forces populations seeking livelihood and opportunity to migrate from rural areas towards cities. This happened in the developed world over the last two centuries and has been happening in the developing countries for the last few decades.

Experience shows that industrial growth is also usually accompanied by a combination of a "green revolution" and farm mechanization that improve productivity in agriculture. This creates a surplus of labour that moves towards urban areas that are more prosperous. This in turn fuels further urbanization, concentrating wealth and infrastructure in large cities. Rural areas are drained of resources, including working age populations.

Mr Chairman

We are all aware of the problems of rapid urbanization. Creaking and inadequate urban infrastructure, overcrowding, precarious housing, growing pollution, crime and public health problems are daily challenges in many cities. Unplanned urban growth in these circumstances has led to the rapid growth of slums, one of the most unpleasant manifestations of urbanization.

The magnitude of the challenge facing us is brought out by the report on World Population Policies prepared by the Population Division of the UN which estimates that a third of urban dwellers in developing countries live in a slum. UNHABITAT tells us that while urban dwellers often fare better than their rural counterparts, there is growing evidence that living conditions in slums are sometimes as difficult as in some of the poorest rural areas and that more and more poor people globally are to be found in urban centres.

The year 2008 is a landmark in the sense that for the first time in history, the world's urban population will equal its rural population.

Mr Chairman,

Most of this population growth expected in urban areas will be concentrated in the cities and towns of the less developed regions of the world. I agree with the Secretary General when he states that the redistribution of the world's population towards urban areas can have both positive and negative implications for the environment, social welfare and the economy, depending on how it is managed. Dealing with these changes in population distribution is therefore a major preoccupation of policy makers in India and other developing countries.

Mr Chairman,

The Secretary General's Expert Group on Urbanization, Internal Migration and Development (ESA/P/WP.206) states in its report that while internal migration is one of the causes of this demographic shift, it is not the principal one. Urban growth is due mostly to natural increase and the transformation of rural settlements into urban areas – the so called 'peri-urban' areas. It also confirms that most urban population growth is taking place in small cities.

India, in the memorable language of the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, still lives in its villages. Currently about 28% of India's population - 285 million people – lives in urban areas. This is expected to increase to about 40 per cent of total population by the year 2021. At the same time, it is estimated that by the year 2011, urban areas would contribute about 65 per cent of the GDP.

A fundamental assumption underlying the Government of India's policies is that rural and urban areas are interdependent and must grow together. This echoes the call of

the Cairo Conference for Governments to adopt a balanced attitude towards sustainable regional development with equal emphasis on growth of rural and urban areas and on the growth of administrative capacity to deal with these issues.

Mr Chairman,

The Government is making an enormous effort to create rural infrastructure and eradicate poverty through the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and the Bharat Nirman or "Build India" programme. At the same time, it believes that India cannot attain the Millennium Development Goals unless there are massive investments in the urban sector and a modification of the policy framework to manage urbanization. This is the purpose of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission launched in 2005 to improve urban amenities and attack urban poverty through direct state intervention and the involvement of civil society and the people. Budgetary allocations for these programs run into billions of dollars per annum.

The ambitious Panchayati Raj (elected Local Councils) scheme, the largest effort towards decentralizing governance in a democratic framework in world history, is the living embodiment of the Cairo Conference's recommendation that these issues be addressed in a participatory manner.

Mr Chairman,

The Annual Report on the flow of financial resources for assisting in the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development for this Conference (E/CN.9/2008/5), makes for worrying reading.

In spite of an increase in the resources available, and even if estimates and projections hold, and indeed are surpassed, the resources mobilized will not be sufficient to meet current needs. The demand for resources has grown dramatically since the targets were agreed upon in 1994 at Cairo. The AIDS pandemic, sky-rocketing health care costs and the depreciation in the value of the dollar compared to the period when the targets were set means that existing financial targets are insufficient to meet the needs of developing countries today.

Mr Chairman

I would like to endorse the Secretary General's call for the international community to mobilize the resources that are required. Additional resources are needed for the AIDS pandemic and for family planning and reproductive health. These are essential in the context of our common endeavours to attain the goals that we set out before ourselves during the Cairo Summit and through the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr Chairman,

I would like to conclude by saying that the costs of failure are huge. The theme of the current session of the Commission on Population and Development is timely in reminding us of the gravity of the situation and in providing us a platform for working towards solving these problems.

I thank you, Mr Chairman.

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