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& HUMAN RIGHTS
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Oral Statement of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute Inc. at the 50th Session of the Commission on Population and Development

Chairperson,

Fifty years ago, the Commission on Population and Development was established to study and propose solutions to the “population question” that weighed heavily in the minds of policy makers.

Demographers at the time predicted that overpopulation would lead to famines, mass starvation, and deadly wars. They were wrong. Thanks to technology more people emerged out of poverty in the past 50 years than ever before.

The population question today is not high fertility, but low fertility and aging

Today, the goal of eradicating poverty, which seemed well within our reach only a few years ago, is under threat because of new and unprecedented challenges created by the opposite problem, low fertility and aging.

According to the biennial World Bank Global Monitoring Report 2015-2016 low fertility and ageing are already causing drag on the global economy and impacting global GDP. What the future holds is very troubling.

Emerging economies will struggle to find markets for their resources and products. Shrinking workforces in the countries that account for nearly 80% of global GDP will lead to a slump in global economic output. And the stress on social protection systems from rapidly aging populations will exacerbate poverty in developing countries.

There has been much talk about Africa reaping a “demographic dividend” of sorts in the near future thanks to its large cohort of youth. But the inevitable economic slowdown from low fertility and aging in developed countries threatens the very possibility of such a dividend ever materializing. In fact, it threatens the goal of poverty eradication altogether.

Sadly, the population establishment, as if haunted by the ghost of the 1950s “population question,” is unable to face present challenges and promotes the same stale policy prescriptions with an overall negative effect on fertility.

Even though survey data shows that less than 2% of women in the developing world “lack access” to modern contraceptives, many in the donor community continue to emphasize fertility reduction.

Worse still, some donors promote policies that undermine the moral fabric of society. To the point where any debate about protection of the family in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international law has become contentious.

Chairperson,

On Monday we heard of the need for a Marshall Plan for education in Africa during the Keynote presentation to empower entire future generations of young Africans to steer their continent on a path to prosperity.

Similar large scale interventions are merited not only in education, but in infrastructure for energy, transportation, and health, particularly maternal health—one of the Millennium Development Goals on which least progress was made, and which remains unfinished business the 2030 Agenda recommits governments as a matter of priority.

But no such Marshall Plans are in sight. And no one is drawing up such plans, except for fertility reduction or the treatment and prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

There is no equivalent to the Gates’ Foundation 2020 Family Planning Initiative or the HIV/AIDS PEPFAR program for education, health, or infrastructure in Africa. But such plans are badly needed. and the 2030 Agenda is an opportunity to direct development assistance to such projects to help reach those farthest behind first, as the 2030 Agenda commits us to do.

Chairperson,

The 2030 Agenda cannot be another round of business as usual.

Even though the 2030 Agenda places unprecedented emphasis on domestic financing for development and fiscal autonomy, it must not become an opportunity for developed nations to shirk their commitments to help those farthest behind first.