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Dear Ms. McCafferty and Mr. Ottaway,

This is in reply to your request for a written contribution as background to the planned debate being organized by the UK All Parliamentary Hearings on "Population growth – impact on the Millennium Development Goals".

Recent discussions of the impacts of population growth in inter-governmental fora have recognized that it is important to consider such questions in the context of specific national circumstances. In this regard, Governments' own views regarding their rates of population growth are key both to assessing current needs and to developing constructive responses.

With this in mind, I have focused in the attached note on a new update of Governments' views regarding the rate of population growth, based on an assessment carried out in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Population Division. I would like to draw your attention to two points from that review:

- In 2005, over half of national Governments in the less developed regions regarded their rates of population growth as being too high. In those regions, the proportion of Governments holding this view showed little change between 1986 and 2005, even though the rate of population growth has fallen substantially in many of the countries concerned.
- At present, it is in the least developed countries that population growth is most rapid, and 80 per cent of the Governments of the least developed countries regard their rate of population growth as being too high.

/.....

Ms. Christine McCafferty MP  
Chair

Mr. Richard Ottaway MP  
Chair, Hearing Steering Committee

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I also enclose a recent report, Population Challenges and Development Goals, which gives a concise overview of the current demographic and trends in relation to the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

I hope that you will find this information useful for your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Jose Antonio Ocampo  
Under-Secretary-General for  
Economic and Social Affairs

Encl.

**Note regarding effects of population growth on achievement of the Millennium Development Goals**

In considering population growth in relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it is useful to refer to the major United Nations conferences held in the 1990s – especially the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994. The outcome document adopted at the 2005 World Summit at United Nations Headquarters in New York stressed that the recommendations of those conferences remain highly relevant in the context of the current focus on the MDGs.

Agenda 21, adopted at UNCED, and the Programme of Action of the ICPD discuss population growth in relation to a range of economic, social and environmental goals, including many areas later highlighted in the MDGs. Both the ICPD Programme of Action and Agenda 21 recognize clearly that demographic factors can put pressure on the environment and can influence the achievement of other development goals. For instance, the ICPD Programme of Action reflects a consensus that: "Efforts to slow down population growth, to reduce poverty, to achieve economic progress, to improve environmental protection, and to reduce unsustainable consumption and production patterns are mutually reinforcing. Slower population growth has in many countries bought more time to adjust to future population increases. This has increased those countries' ability to attack poverty, protect and repair the environment, and build the base for future sustainable development." (para 3.14). Chapter V of Agenda 21– on demographic dynamics and sustainability – and chapter III of the ICPD Programme of Action – on interrelations between population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development – discuss demographic factors in relation to the design and implementation of policies and programmes to promote sustainable development. These international agreements recognize that effects of population growth may vary according to the institutional, social, economic and environmental setting, so that it is important to consider such questions in the context of specific national circumstances.

In 2005, over half of national Governments in the less developed regions, and 80 per cent of Governments of the least developed countries, regarded their rates of population growth as being too high. In the less developed regions as a group, the proportion of Governments holding this view has changed very little between 1986 and 2005, even though the rate of population growth has fallen substantially in many of the countries concerned (tables 1 and 2).

At present, it is in the least developed countries that population growth tends to be most rapid, and a large majority of the Governments of the least developed countries regard their rate of population growth as being too high. The proportion of Governments holding that view has increased from roughly one quarter in 1976 to 80 per cent in 2005 (table 1). Most of these countries experienced more than a doubling of their population between 1975 and 2005. Even though the rate of population growth has recently begun declining in some countries in this group, the growth rate remains high in most cases. During 2000-2005, that rate was over 2 per cent per year in over 70 per cent of the least developed countries (a rate at which the population would double within 35 years).

It should be noted that many countries in this group have rapidly growing populations despite having high, and in some cases increasing, levels of mortality. This group includes many of the countries that are most seriously affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The situation in the more developed regions is very different. In most countries in the more developed regions, the annual rate of population growth was below 0.5 per cent during 2000-2005. Indeed, 14 of the countries in this group, or 29 per cent of the total number, experienced a loss of population during 2000-2005. A majority of national Governments in the more developed regions view their rate of population growth as being satisfactory, but, as rates of population growth have continued declining, a growing number of Governments perceive their rate of growth to be too low. The proportion holding the latter view reached 44 per cent in 2005, up from 18 per cent in 1986.

For more information:

- The recent United Nations publication Population Challenges and Development Goals contains a concise review of population trends in relation to the internationally agreed development goals.

- Further information about demographic trends and population policies is available in the references listed below and on the Internet at: <http://unpopulation.org>.

References:

United Nations (forthcoming). World Population Policies 2005 (New York).

United Nations (2004). World Population Policies 2003, Sales No.E.04.XIII.3 (New York).

United Nations (2005). Population Challenges and Development Goals, Sales No.05.XIII.8 (New York).

United Nations (2005). World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision. CD-ROM. Sales no. E.05.XIII.12 (New York).

TABLE 1. GOVERNMENT VIEWS ON THE RATE OF POPULATION GROWTH:  
 1976, 1986, 1996 AND 2005

Year	<i>Number of countries</i>				<i>Percentage of countries</i>			
	<i>Too low</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Too high</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Too low</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Too high</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>World</i>								
1976	34	67	49	150	23	45	33	100
1986	26	73	65	164	16	45	40	100
1996	31	83	79	193	16	43	41	100
2005	37	81	76	194	19	42	39	100
<i>More developed regions</i>								
1976	11	22	1	34	32	65	3	100
1986	6	28	0	34	18	82	0	100
1996	13	34	1	48	27	71	2	100
2005	21	27	0	48	44	56	0	100
<i>Less developed regions</i>								
1976	23	45	48	116	20	39	41	100
1986	20	45	65	130	15	35	50	100
1996	18	49	78	145	12	34	54	100
2005	16	54	76	146	11	37	52	100
<i>Least developed countries</i>								
1976	6	25	11	42	14	60	26	100
1986	4	20	24	48	8	42	50	100
1996	2	11	36	49	4	22	73	100
2005	0	10	40	50	0	20	80	100

Source: United Nations (forthcoming), *World Population Policies 2005* (New York).

NOTE: More developed regions include Australia/New Zealand, Europe, Japan and Northern America. Less developed regions include Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania, with the exception of Australia/New Zealand and Japan. The group of least developed countries as defined by the General Assembly comprised 50 countries as of 2005. A complete listing may be found at: <http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrlls/ldc/list.htm>.

TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTRIES ACCORDING TO THE ANNUAL RATE OF POPULATION GROWTH:  
 1975-1980 TO 2000-2005

Years	<i>Annual rate of increase (per cent)</i>									
	<i>Number of countries</i>					<i>Percentage of countries</i>				
	<i>2.0 or</i>					<i>2.0 or</i>				
	<i>&lt; 0.5</i>	<i>0.5-0.9</i>	<i>1.0-1.9</i>	<i>over</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>&lt; 0.5</i>	<i>0.5-0.9</i>	<i>1.0-1.9</i>	<i>over</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>World</i>										
1975-1980	31	26	37	100	194	16	13	19	52	100
1985-1990	35	30	31	98	194	18	15	16	51	100
1995-2000	47	21	49	77	194	24	11	25	40	100
2000-2005	52	27	57	58	194	27	14	29	30	100
<i>More developed regions</i>										
1975-1980	18	17	11	2	48	38	35	23	4	100
1985-1990	23	15	8	2	48	48	31	17	4	100
1995-2000	32	8	7	1	48	67	17	15	2	100
2000-2005	35	6	7	0	48	73	13	15	0	100
<i>Less developed regions</i>										
1975-1980	13	9	26	98	146	9	6	18	67	100
1985-1990	12	15	23	96	146	8	10	16	66	100
1995-2000	15	13	42	76	146	10	9	29	52	100
2000-2005	17	21	50	58	146	12	14	34	40	100
<i>Least developed countries</i>										
1975-1980	3	3	4	40	50	6	6	8	80	100
1985-1990	2	3	3	42	50	4	6	6	84	100
1995-2000	1	1	7	41	50	2	2	14	82	100
2000-2005	2	1	11	36	50	4	2	22	72	100

Source: Tabulated from United Nations (2005), World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision, CD ROM, Sales No. E.05.XIII.12.

NOTE: See notes to table 1. Data in the present table pertain to the 194 countries or areas included in table 1 for 2005.