



**INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF POPULATION
IUSSP – UIESP**

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THIRTY -SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

FOLLOW -UP ACTIONS TO THE RE COMMENDATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, IUSSP, as the only international professional association of population scientists, has long been a partner of the United Nations system in raising awareness about population issues. In fact, the first World Population Conference, held in Rome in 1954 under the auspices of the United Nations, was the result of collaboration between the IUSSP and the United Nations. Today, nearly fifty years after that event, IUSSP continues to promote the objective and comprehensive discussion of key population issues at the regional and global levels. With members in 130 countries, the IUSSP is ideally situated to foster the international exchange of information, ideas and expertise among population specialists, including those guiding the formulation of policy and those managing population programmes.

During the past year, for instance, the IUSSP organized a very successful regional population conference in South-east Asia, in collaboration with Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. The Conference, which was held in June 2002, brought together over 350 population specialists from Asia and other regions. The Conference included a special forum on population ageing, organized in collaboration with UNFPA, where panels of experts discussed the social and economic implications of rapid population ageing in Asia and developed a useful regional agenda for operational research and training priorities. A second important focus of this regional conference was the interrelations between poverty and population. A report summarizing the key conclusions and policy implications of the Conference was used as a background document for the Fifth Asia-Pacific Population Conference (APPC) organized by ESCAP last year, where government representatives centred their discussion around the theme of Population and Poverty in Asia and the Pacific.

Work on furthering our understanding of the interrelations between poverty and population dynamics continues under the auspices of IUSSP. Last year a Panel on Population and Poverty was constituted. The first seminar organized by this Panel will be held in November 2003 in Mexico City and will consider the role of social programs -- broadly defined to include health, family planning, schooling, and related programs -- in mediating the relationship between poverty and demographic variables. Papers prepared for this seminar will investigate whether social programs reduce socio-economic disparities in outcomes such as unwanted pregnancy and

child survival, and they will examine the demographic impact of programs designed for other purposes, such as programs intended to increase school attendance. The IUSSP intends to continue to support scientific activities on population and poverty, mindful of the centrality of poverty reduction in the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations.

Mr. Chairman, the IUSSP commends this Commission for choosing “Population, Education, and Development” as the theme of this session. The powerful associations between education and basic population processes, including fertility, marriage, and mortality, are among the best-established empirical regularities that have emerged from research presented at IUSSP conferences and seminars. Recognizing this, population scientists have made critical contributions to our understanding of the determinants and consequences of educational attainment, among other reasons because population censuses and demographic surveys are among the best sources of data on schooling. These data document a truly stunning increase in educational attainment throughout the world, and especially in developing countries, in the period since 1950. Considering that this has occurred simultaneously with substantial increases in the size of successive birth cohorts, this should be regarded as one of the remarkable accomplishments of the past fifty years. It is an important accomplishment because, as the Population Division’s report on Population, Education and Development rightly points out, access to primary education is a potent means of reducing poverty and inequality.

Yet, despite the major strides made in improving levels of educational attainment in most countries of the world, there are still 115 million children of school age who do not attend school. And they tend to be concentrated in the poorest countries of the world. Lack of schooling or low levels of educational attainment among women often lead to early childbearing and larger family sizes. The onset of sexual activity also tends to occur earlier among women with lower levels of education. And, as the Population Division report notes and the work of the IUSSP Committee on Emerging Health Threats confirms, mortality tends to be higher among persons with less education. Furthermore, in many countries health and mortality differentials by socio-economic status are increasing, implying that people with little or no schooling are failing to catch up with the rest of society in terms of health improvements. The fact that children from lower status households are also much less likely to attend school, as demographic survey document, further compounds the problem. This vicious cycle can lead to an inter-generational transmission of poor health; to break it, it is crucial that primary schooling be provided to all segments of society.

Attaining educational parity between boys and girls has been a priority, and here the data are most encouraging. Gender disparities in child school attendance have nearly disappeared in most countries during the past two decades, and indeed in some countries the average schooling of girls now exceeds that of boys. This change demonstrates that long-standing schooling disparities can be reduced and even eliminated when gender equality becomes a policy priority.

The implications of differentials in access to schooling and in educational attainment in shaping the lives of young women and men will be the focus of a new IUSSP activity on the life course of adolescents in developing countries. The size of the cohorts of adolescents in most developing countries is at historic highs, presenting significant policy challenges; this makes it all the more important to engage in research on the transition to adulthood that can provide insights for the formulation and implementation of policy.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, let me note that the IUSSP continues to promote awareness of the importance of population trends for sustainable development. The IUSSP sponsored the work of the Global Science Panel on Population and the Environment whose science policy statement on population and sustainable development was widely circulated during the preparatory activities leading to the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development. Members of the Global Science Panel attended the Johannesburg Summit itself, where they stressed the message that development and environment issues cannot be treated without taking account of population issues.

Clearly, Mr. Chairman, while the impressive reductions of fertility that have taken place over the last fifty years imply that excessive population growth at the world level no longer constitutes the threat perceived thirty or forty years ago, other facets of future population trends pose important challenges at the world, regional and national levels. Sharp disparities among countries in their future population trajectories, rapid population ageing in the developing world, the stagnation or increase of mortality levels experienced by many countries, the spread of HIV/AIDS, are all issues that deserve attention and concerted action to address them. As we look into the future and assess the gains made, particularly since the last major International Conference on Population and Development, the IUSSP is prepared to continue its close cooperation with the United Nations system in providing a scientific foundation for the development of policies and programs to address continuing and emerging problems.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, IUSSP wishes to commend the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Population Fund for the rich and thorough documentation presented to this Commission on the special theme of this session. The excellent research presented here certainly provides a solid basis on which to assess the implementation of the Programme of Action of ICPD.