

ICPD+10 OR BUCHAREST +30?¹

Riad Tabbarah²

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to thank the Secretariat of the United Nations, particularly the Population Division and its Director, Joseph Chamie, for inviting me to address this august assembly. Needless to say, I consider this a great honor. Having served this Commission some three decades ago, I also feel, in doing this, a deep sense of both nostalgia and history.

This is the year of ICPD + 10, so my first thought was to make this the title of my statement. But then I thought that it did not all start with ICPD ten years ago, it actually started with Bucharest 30 years ago. This reminded me of a conversation I had in Bucharest in 1974 with the late Alfred Sauvy, one of the great pioneers of economic demography, while we were waiting for the opening of the World Population Conference. I told Mr. Sauvy that when I was an undergradu

contributions to the understanding of the determinants and consequences of population trends and to the demography of developing countries. But the Division never had a population policy program, or a population policy section, and was not authorized to work in this field. It was left for another

comprehensive international population strategy. For many, in those days, it looked like a quixotic undertaking.

The second thing that became clear from the document in question was that, until 1969 at least, the Population Commission could not agree on a program of work that went beyond formal demography and into population policy. Thus, in 1967, that is a mere two years before the Population Commission's recommendation to hold the World Population Conference in Bucharest, the Commission's report stated that **some countries** felt "that in the past there had been too great a concentration upon the statistical aspects of demography and their more formal applications, and that it was now necessary to shift the emphasis to economic, social and health aspects of **population growth** in order to achieve a balanced program." [Emphasis added] So it was not the Commission that felt that way but only "some countries" and this had to do, as has already been the case with practically all references to population, mainly with "population growth".

The recommendation of the Commission in 1969 to hold an international intergovernmental conference and the subsequent decision of the Economic and Social Council to hold the World Population Conference in 1974

demographer in the tradition of Durand and Macura, has produced pioneering work in international migration and urbanization, as well as fertility, mortality, ageing and other areas of population concern.

With regard to the international funding of population, however, the story since Bucharest has been quite different. The debate 30 years ago regarding the scope of the population field may have been won by those advocating the broader definition, but it did not much affect the structure of international population assistance. On the contrary, the flow of funding to population became almost totally concentrated on one aspect, albeit an important one, namely, the general area of what the World Population Plan of Action called in 1974 “reproduction, family formation and status of women” with a small percentage being devoted to data collection and research. Data on trends in population assistance by category of activity collected in the context of UNFPA/NIDI Resource

more than four times the rate of growth of world population. While the exact impact of this assistance is difficult to gauge, there is no doubt that results, in the areas of action, have been quite significant. However, persisting in this approach much longer runs the risk of dangerously distorting national priorities and permanently narrowing the field of assistance to population, thus marginalizing other important areas of population concern, such as migration and structure, which are not only important for most developing countries but also important for their contribution to sustainable development and international harmony. It also runs the risk of sidelining the use of indirect social and economic measures aimed at achieving population goals and thus isolating population policy from overall socio economic policies of development. If we persist we run the risk of letting funding determine policy instead of the other way around.

Let me give you the example of my country. As you probably know, in 1991 Lebanon came out of a devastating war that had disastrous repercussions on its economy, society, political structure and, of course, demographic conditions. About one third of its population was displaced at one time or another during the war, an estimated one third emigrated and, not least because of the economic difficulties that ensued, heavy emigration, particularly of educated youth, continues to this day. One immediate result of this heavy emigration that is dominated by males of marriageable ages, is that the rates of celibacy among women doubled since before the war for every age group caused mainly by the low availability of mate ratios. This has resulted in a number of unintended social changes and triggered the emigration of single educated women, a phenomenon seen in Lebanon for the first time. The National Population Policy Document, without minimizing the importance of reproductive health and family planning measures, particularly in the poorer areas of the country, placed, among its first priorities, internal migration, particularly forced migration, international migration, particularly the migration of educated youth, and the need to integrate population policies in the overall development process. The flow of funds to population activities, however, remained highly concentrated on reproductive health and family planning with practically no funding going to migration. According to UNFPA data posted on the web¹¹, for the period 1997-2001, 92 per cent of regular resources and more than 93 per cent of total resources were to be devoted to reproductive health. The present, better balanced program, however, devotes some 30 per cent of the budget to other areas of population concern but still has practically no funding for the various issues of population movements and minimal funding for issues of population structure. I do not, of course, minimize the positive effect of this assistance on Lebanon. It was instrumental in the development of the national population policy document itself, it was crucial to the great advances made in reproductive health in the country where national indicators on the subject have reached Western standards, it gave critical support to the articulation of means for the further empowerment of women and, through its advocacy program, helped create general awareness and understanding of the importance of population issues in general. But it is time already to give due emphasis to the other population priorities and this can be greatly helped by a change in emphasis at the global level.

¹¹ www.unfpa.org.lb/unfpa_leb/country_prog.htm

What I am advocating here is that Bucharest + 30 should see the initiation of what may be called phase 3 in the approach of the international community to population policies and population assistance. Phase one was extremely successful in making the United Nations the leader in the development of formal demography. Phase two saw impressive accomplishments in important aspects of population policy, particularly reproductive health and the empowerment of women and, in general, raised substantially the interest of the international community in population policy, as evidence