

**STATEMENT BY MR. JOSÉ LUIS MACHINEA, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN,  
AT THE OPENING MEETING OF THE ECLAC SESSIONAL AD HOC  
COMMITTEE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

21 March 2006

Mr. Federico Estrada Meyer, Chairperson of the ECLAC sessional Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development,  
Ms. Marisel Padrón, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Population Fund,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Delegates,  
Representatives of United Nations agencies, programmes and bodies,  
Representatives of intergovernmental and civil society networks,  
Colleagues and friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to address you all on this tenth anniversary of the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development. As you will recall, this Committee was created at the ECLAC session held in 1994 in order to follow up the Regional Plan of Action on Population and Development, which was adopted by the countries of the region in order to guide the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, often referred to as the Cairo Programme of Action. CELADE, the Population Division of ECLAC, serves as the technical secretariat for this Committee, which provides it with guidelines regarding the steps to be taken and priority areas of its work in this field.

ECLAC regards the follow-up and analysis of demographic trends in Latin America and the Caribbean and their links to economic and social development as tasks of crucial importance, especially as they relate to measures for raising the living standards and providing greater social protection to the entire population. The approach to be taken to these tasks must be a productive, inclusive, participatory one that is founded upon solidarity and human rights. This second topic the issue of social protection— is the main focus of the study which ECLAC has prepared for presentation to the delegations for their consideration at the meetings to be held as part of this session on Wednesday.

Population dynamics, and especially the rapid ageing of the region's population, are vital components of the frame of reference for an examination of the question of social protection, both now and in the future. As we all know, both of these factors have a direct influence on the size and composition of the populations that contribute to and benefit from social protection systems and policies.

The countries of the region are making a major effort to upgrade the social protection provided to all sectors of the population. To this end, they are pursuing social programmes targeting school-age children and youth, older adults, and lower-income groups in general. The considerable transfers being made via such programmes are providing a portion of the livelihoods for the young and old dependent population and are playing a valuable role in alleviating poverty. Nevertheless, we can and must upgrade these programmes, administer them more efficiently and, most importantly, make them more effective as redistributive tools. This is especially important in the case of low-income groups and children, who make up a large percentage of the poor population in many countries of the region. And in order to accomplish this, we must improve the region's network of social institutions with a view to increasing programme transparency, assessment, continuity and coordination.

This approach based on life cycles should also be used to tackle shortcomings and inequities affecting the economic security of older persons. The document on social protection to be presented on Wednesday states that - notwithstanding major differences between countries - an average of six in every 10 people aged over 70 receive no pension whatsoever. Given our conviction that receiving a pension is the right of every citizen, we are formulating a proposal whereby countries guarantee a pension to all older persons with incomes below the poverty line.

In the face of weak social security systems, private transfers and help from relatives have an important role to play. Transfers can range from direct monetary assistance and sharing a residence to care and attention, all of which benefits children and young people as much as older persons. When older adults live with younger family members, the former provide a considerable proportion of the household income, including what they receive from social security. Private and public transfers within families could thus be said to complement each other by contributing to intergenerational solidarity and social protection in the broad sense of the word.

Although social protection is the key theme of this session, the Committee will focus its work on international migration, human rights and development in Latin America and the Caribbean (which has become one of the main concerns of the United Nations). Our organization is unbiased in terms of these issues, and simply seeks to show that migration is a major engine of development that has a positive contribution to make to countries of origin and destination.

As far as the United Nations is concerned, migration is an integral part of development. Respect and protection for the human rights of all migrants should therefore underpin measures aimed at taking full advantage of the benefits of migration. Although States have the sovereign right to decide who enters and remains on their territory, they are also bound to protect the rights of migrants within their borders and protect them from racism and xenophobia. In return, migrants must adhere to the laws in force in their host countries.

It is in this context that ECLAC endeavours to provide guidelines in response to the question marks raised by migration in the region. ECLAC studies show that migration has increased considerably among Latin American and Caribbean people, to the extent that 25 million people from the region now live outside their countries of origin. Many of these migrants are women, a phenomenon that merits further examination on account of its gender equity potential. Latin American and Caribbean people are present in many countries, where they help

to disseminate their own culture and contribute to progress in the host countries, while forming communities that remain in constant contact with their places of origin.

For all these reasons, governments need us to provide them with tailor-made country-specific information that enables them to take advantage of the individual and collective opportunities offered by migration when it involves some level of social and labour mobility. Countries must also tackle the threat to migrants' rights and attend to the rights of families who live apart as a result of migration. As pointed out by the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan on International Migrants Day (18 December 2005), international migration is a feature of today's world. No country in this region is unaffected, and all States should therefore prepare themselves for handling migration in a way that benefits everyone, irrespective of whether they are host, source, transit or return countries.

Making full use of the opportunities and benefits requires tackling the obstacles faced by international migration. Developed economies need the skills, knowledge and manpower of migrant workers, who promote the exchange of ideas and stimulate cultural and scientific progress. This in turn benefits the countries of origin. Source countries also benefit from migrant remittances, which have significantly positive effects in terms of both macroeconomics and the level of poverty of the individual households receiving them. Emigration could therefore be said to benefit everyone, although such benefits are diminished by the infringement on migrants' rights and the discrimination they suffer. These are the obstacles we need to overcome.

The United Nations is implementing measures to improve the situation. I therefore call on all countries to take the lead both in presenting proposals at the high-level dialogue on international migration and development to be held in during the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006 and during preparatory activities such as the next meeting of the Committee on Population and Development. As pointed out by the Secretary-General, the high-level dialogue is an unprecedented opportunity for member States to forge closer ties for cooperation in this area.

I would like to mention the valuable subregional forums on migration that have the support of ECLAC, such as the Regional Conference on Migration and the South American Conference on Migration.

Given the importance of ratifying the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, I would like to reiterate the appeal of the Secretary-General to all States that have not yet ratified it. The ratification and subsequent implementation of the Convention will help countries make full use of the benefits of international migration.

Another important issue that will be analysed by this Committee, and that is also broached in the session document, is population ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is a major regional phenomenon, as it is a widespread process that will pick up speed in the next few decades. It will challenge Latin American and Caribbean societies to develop new forms of work, community living and service provision for an increasingly older population.

Rights-based social protection, in the context of the protection systems described in the session document, should aim to guarantee a minimum level of economic security for older people and their families.

Following the adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in 2002, Latin American and Caribbean countries formulated a regional strategy for its implementation in 2003. ECLAC has organized three expert meetings to closely examine progress in its application: two in 2004 (El Salvador and Trinidad and Tobago) and one in November 2005 (Argentina).

The Madrid Plan of Action will be reviewed and assessed five years following its adoption, namely in 2007. Given that this date is imminent, and in the light of the recently adopted agreements relating to the forty-fourth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the sessional Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development must determine the process for reviewing the Madrid Plan of Action and define the mechanisms and activities needed for its appraisal in Latin America and the Caribbean.

I am pleased that the subject of the main session document coincides with some of the foremost concerns of the Committee. I therefore call on you all to take part in the proceedings on Wednesday and Thursday, so that other participants can benefit from your valuable contributions.

I am certain that the discussions during today and tomorrow will be most fruitful, and that they will enable the region's countries to make great strides forward in all of the areas in question.

Thank you.