



## INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Commission on Population and Development  
Fortieth session  
New York, 9 – 13 April 2007

General Discussion under Agenda Item 4:  
National experiences in population matters: the changing age structures of  
populations and their implications for development

Statement by  
Djankou Ndjonkou  
Representative of the U.S. to the United Nations and  
Director

Mr. Chairman,

The theme before this Commission is indeed positive as it signifies an important advancement in the longevity of human life. However, the Secretary-General's report points out a number of economic and social implications as a result of population ageing.

In many countries, longer life expectancy has not been accompanied by longer working lives. Average retirement ages have dropped, posing a threat to the financial viability of public budgets and, as a result, older people risk being socially excluded. Many older persons who would like to work longer are discriminated against and are forced to leave the labour market prematurely or move to low-quality jobs. Furthermore, the inability of many to address the growing population of youth seeking employment threatens to undermine development.

Since the early 1990's, the ILO has been working to develop innovative strategies to meet such challenges and to facilitate the extension of working lives in productive and decent work.

There is much debate about the impact of ageing on social security systems. While high-income countries face the challenge of ensuring the sustainability of social protection systems, the main challenge for low-income countries is to extend social security coverage to the most vulnerable groups. A number of experiences has shown that the promotion of decent work is the best way to ensure social protection for and to allow older age groups the possibility of remaining active longer.

This is particularly important for developing countries where poverty among older populations is an increasing concern. In these countries, it is essential to find ways of extending social security, with attention being given to appropriate social labour policies for older people. Policies such as those related to skills development within a lifelong learning framework are also important.

The challenges of demographic change are common to all countries, yet each will find different strategies to address them. These strategies should aim to strengthen the role of social security as a productive factor in promoting employment, stimulating structural change and fostering economic growth.

Examples from some countries have shown that access to social security for the older population is affordable also in low-income countries, and that the improved livelihoods of older people will equally benefit younger generations, especially in countries most affected by HIV/AIDS.

Another area of concern is the situation of migrant workers relying on state or private social protection and thereby lacking access to pension schemes and adequate health services. Thus, an examination of the scope and limitations of replacement migration is useful for addressing impacts of new demographic trends.

Finally, due regard should be given to providing an adequate working environment for older workers. This includes the elimination of conditions which are unsafe, unhealthy, or

otherwise life-threatening. In this regard, the ILO has worked to elaborate numerous international labour standards relating to older workers, including the *Convention on Older Workers' Disadvantages*, 1980 (No. 160); the *Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention*, 1952 (No. 102), and the *Invalidity, Old Age and Survivors' Benefits Convention*, 1967 (No. 103), and the *Recommendation* (No. 104). Moreover, during the upcoming International Labour Conference in June 2007, the issue of age discrimination in the workplace will be addressed as a follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Mr. Chairman,

Indeed, the ability to create jobs and better manage the changing population's age structure will give way for increased production and improved standards of living. Productive and decent work is the most powerful lever to maintain and extend social protection at all stages of life. This requires complementary measures such as promoting labour rights of older workers through, *inter alia*, combating age discrimination.

In addition, social dialogue plays a critical role in the design and implementation of policies for older workers. All of these measures are related to the ILO's strategic objectives contained in the Decent Work Agenda, namely, *decent work, employment, social protection and social dialogue*. For older workers, this means an opportunity to remain an active part of the economy and society in conditions of dignity, freedom, equity and security.

Thank you.