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**Population and sustainable development, in
particular sustained and inclusive economic growth**

Statement submitted by Doha International Family Institute, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council¹

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Stating the current reality – the international decline in fertility rates

According to evidence, there are seventy-five countries whose fertility levels dropped below the replacement level which is 2.1 child per woman and this number is expected to increase to 120 by 2050 (UNDESA, 2015). The decline in the fertility rate represents a great challenge to countries because it leads to a decrease in the population. Equally, it leads to an increase in number of elderly citizens and the decrease of the working force which is needed for national development and economic growth.

Factors impacting low fertility are diverse and multiple

In some countries the drop of fertility levels is fuelled by the postponement of marriage and children bearing (UNDESA, 2015). In others, it is induced by cultural factors, the working conditions of the labour market, the educational system, housing, youth unemployment, or prevailing gender norms, amongst other influential factors (ibid). Declining populations pose far deeper threats than simply a decline in the number of people. In a world where its population is ageing rapidly, immense pressure is placed on working-age individuals to support their families and the country. The diminishing number of young people to replace the elderly upon retirement will oblige the elderly to be more dependent on the social welfare system or continue working beyond retirement age. Social welfare systems in countries with declining populations will suffer from an increased demand and pressure on programs offered by the State (Glowaki & Richamond, 2007).

The impact of declining fertility rates on policymaking

Policymakers are concerned about the impact of low fertility on the demographic structure of the population, the age structure, the work force, the social security network, and the impact that all these different aspects have on countries' development, economic growth and prosperity. Therefore, the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) undertook research on the "Social Aspects of Fertility in Qatar", with the aim of identifying the factors that affect the decline in fertility rates among the Qatari community, benchmarking the international best practices in terms of their policies and programs and proposing policies and programs that support raising the current fertility rates, or at least slowdown or stop their decline.

The issue of fertility in Qatar

As in other Arab Gulf states, the issue of fertility is of a particular importance in Qatar. Unlike most developing countries, including Arab countries which seek to limit the population growth rates, the State of Qatar seeks to increase these rates, given the decreasing fertility rates, as well as the decreasing percentage of citizens among the total population. Fertility rates have declined at high rates during the past three decades with a decrease from 5.3 in 1986 to 4.6 in 1997 to 4.2 in 2005 to 2.9 in 2017, according to the Population Statistics Authority in Qatar. The primary results of DIFI's study showed that there was an array of factors that affect the decline in fertility rates, including personal, economic, structural, and contextual, educational, health and factors related to work-family balance policies.

The way forward

To support the increase of fertility rates or to slow down the decline, an array of recommendations can be implemented such as an increase in awareness levels that provides information on the changing values and the personal factors affecting

fertility decisions; to implement a set of financial support policies such as child-care allowances as well as policies and programs that support in the cost of marriage, housing, parenting, and childbearing. Additionally, introducing work-family balance policies including a revision of parental leaves, child-care and flexible work arrangements. Finally, it is important to conduct research and study the impact of health on fertility and the use of health technology on fertility rates.
