

His Excellency, the High Commissioner

Ladies and Gentlemen

When the High Commissioner invited me to participate in this seminar in January this year in New York, he promised me a very interesting seminar. He has kept his promise. It was indeed a very, interesting seminar. I am sure you would agree with me that the survey results that have been shown this morning are indeed very interesting and thought provoking. I am so glad that so many of you from the ministries, the regions, the international agencies, and the diplomatic community are here today to take advantage of this invaluable opportunity to understand and to discuss the changes in the Moroccan society.

Let me say, first of all, a few words on the demographic survey, and the importance of it. The survey is expensive, but it is very well done. It covers a large number of households, over one hundred thousand households over a period of time. It is extremely important to do a good survey with reliable results; it brings immeasurable insights and knowledge to the society. The High Commissioner for Planning talked about the choices between investment and consumption. I would like to say that doing this survey is definitely an investment for the future, an investment in the understanding of the changes in the Morocco society. I understand that the next measurement point of these changes in the society will be the 2014 population census. I am quite sure that the census will provide another data point to understand these changes. And I really hope that a few years after the census, in 2014, another large survey will be done to provide inter-censal measurement.

We all know that the population is dynamic and it changes over time. The population dynamic is a result of development, and is also a cause for developmental changes as well. What we have seen today, the improvements in mortality, the changes in fertility, the changes in marriage, the changes in migration, mean that something profound is happening in the Moroccan society and economy. The population is adjusting, changing its health, marriage and family behaviors in response to these developmental changes. There can only be one clear conclusion: that the developments have been very positive in the last years, and that is why the population's behavior is changing in these directions. Let me elaborate.

Professor Courbage talked about modernization or modernity, and I have exactly the same words written in my notes. Indeed, these changes are often associated with modern lifestyle or a 'modernized society'. But it is more than modernization. It is a change towards the better, in your own way of creating a better society. The High Commissioner talked about a new society. I can really see that a new society is indeed emerging, where people live a better and longer life.

But what are some of the consequences associated with these changes? Professor Courbage talked about this demographic bonus: the dependency ratio of the younger ages will be declining because of declining fertility and the dependency of the older people is not increasing yet because the population is still youthful. In other words, the bulk of the population is in what we call the working ages. We call this a demographic bonus or dividend. How then can we take advantage of this working group population, with good education, good health, and how to make them more productive in the economic development? This is a key development challenge.

When it comes to marriage and fertility, the movement towards late marriage and smaller family size is also associated with what we call modern family attributes. Many countries around the world, especially those in Asia and Europe, are very concerned about this phenomenon. At first they are happy because they see these trends as associated with 'modern' family patterns. But after prolonged decline in marriage and fertility, countries become worried because the pattern is becoming extreme. For example, in Singapore, my home country, at age 30 to 34, the proportion of single people is much lower than it is in Morocco. But the government is very concerned because late marriage means lower fertility, and the government wants to have higher fertility. As a result, the Singapore government put in a lot of new services, including match-making services, and organized a lot of activities for girls and boys. Could Mister

But more importantly, when at age 30 to 34, some 42% of men are not married, this is a very important social indicator. It is important for the Moroccan society to understand this indicator, because there could be a few possible scenarios. The fact that they could not get married could be because they cannot afford housing, they don't have a job, or because they cannot find a good partner, they are forced out of the marriage market. Then it is a problem. But on the other hand, if this is a result of the young people having good jobs and they are very interested in their career, and therefore delaying their marriage for career reasons, then it is a 'me-generation' phenomenon. The family institution may not be the same as before.

This means that we need to go deeper in the analysis of the data and in understanding the changes in the society. The High Commissioner talked about the Friday seminars at the High Commission for Planning. Maybe you can discuss more about the implications of these issues at these seminars.

Let me mention two more points. The first point is that the High Commissioner put a lot of emphasis on this issue of new values. I think this is the most important point. I think Professor Courbage will be able to tell you how different the Moroccan pattern of family and society is, as revealed in this set of numbers, from the rest of the Arab world. Similar countries with such trends among other Muslim societies are Malaysia or Indonesia. We are talking about a whole new family ideal, based on stable

marriage and very few divorces; somewhat late marriage; very few children. Basically, this is a very modern or western kind of family. If we believe that the family institution adjust its size and behavior according to the larger society, then, this means that the society is also changing. The family change is always more profound and significant than in the larger society, as the family is the foundation of the society. And this put emphasis on the quality of life of the family; between the husband and the wife; between the parents and children; and across generations. This, I think, is worth a deeper understanding.

I think that the results presented today are indeed ground breaking. And I think it is very essential to take a longer term perspective to understand what will happen if this trend continues for another ten to twenty years. Population projections become very important here. If the fertility rate continues to fall under replacement rate and far below, then the manpower issue becomes an important issue for the future. It means that your agriculture sector needs to be more productive using fewer workers in the future. As the rural-urban migration intensifies, because people want to have a better life, there will be a lot of emphasis on the quality of life for children and for the family, which will translate into a greater demand of services from the government. In the old days, there was a lot of reliance on the family institution which was the key provider of all services. In the new era, with smaller families, there is a transfer of reliance on services from the family to the government, to the state. And so, the government would have to live up to its responsibility.

This set of issues requires deeper understanding. And this seminar is really a very good start of this whole new process of learning and understanding such profound issues. I hope that you will very quickly convey the new life expectancy data to the Human Development Report Office, so that they can update the human development index and the ranking of Morocco will rise a few notches!!

Thank you.

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Paul Cheung

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