

H.E. Mr. António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
Executive Office of the Secretary-General S-3800
United Nations Secretariat Bldg New York, NY 10017

Open letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres regarding the urgent need for a new statement on family planning

July 10, 2019

Mr. Secretary-General,

We write to follow up on our letters from [April 10, 2018](#), [September 27, 2018](#), and [December 11, 2018](#), suggesting that you make an informal statement on the need for a new ethic, and a truly human rights-based approach to family planning. The need for change is more urgent than ever. A number of respected groups and subject area experts are now joining our call for action:

Population Matters (UK)
OneProtest (US)
World Population Balance (US)
Earth Overshoot (US)
Population Institute Canada
Sustainable Population Australia
In Defense of Animals (US)
34 Million Friends of UNFPA (US)
Wilderness Watch (US)
Seeding Sovereignty (US)
Terry Spahr, Producer, 8 Billion Angels
Dr. Sarah Bexell, Institute for Human-Animal Connection, the University of Denver

Since our last letters, several developments have underscored the need for a new approach. Current and downstream attempts to deal with climate change are failing.

[Per the New York Times:](#)

Even if every country were to meet the pledges already made under the 2015 Paris agreement — and [they are nowhere on track to do so](#) — it would be insufficient to avert the worst effects of climate change. An “exponential increase in ambition,” Mr. de Alba [UN envoy on climate change] said, is needed. “We need to step up ambition quite radically. We are not talking about a small incremental approach,” he said.

The time is appropriate for a proactive international family planning approach that explicitly promotes smaller, equitable and sustainable families. As you know, [small changes in average](#)

[fertility rates have massive impacts on population growth](#), and [smaller families](#) are the best way to confront climate change, species extinction, as well as other and related environmental crises. [The evidence is clear](#).

The current UN model of family planning places the empowerment of parents to make free and informed choices about family size at its heart. ICPD also recognizes however, that “in the exercise of this right, they [parents] should take into account the needs of their living and future children and their responsibilities towards the community.” The risks to living and future children are far greater than any of us could have imagined at the time of the ICPD.

Since then, we have learned much about climate change, the disproportionate impact of early childhood development on human wellbeing, and the way birth conditions and early childhood disparities can exacerbate inequality and its consequences. We now know of the existential threats of climate change, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification and other environmental crises. An approach that does not properly balance parental choice and protection of future generations risks making our future less secure, less healthy, and less equitable than it should be. That balance can be struck, protecting the rights of parents and children alike.

As we noted in our previous letters, former Secretaries-General have issued influential statements on family planning. Prior statements have focused on parents; we urge you to now focus on the needs of future children, and how those needs and rights, like those laid out in the Children’s Rights Convention (“the Convention”), must shape [truly human rights-based family planning models](#). Circumstances have changed since many of the prior statements were made; a new statement is urgently needed. Again:

- Several studies confirm that [smaller families](#) are the best way to confront climate change, as well as other and related environmental crises. They allow us to maximize investments in each child, and the development of the resilience children will need in the future. If we take climate change seriously, we must laud the benefits of a global family planning ethic that promotes smaller families.
- The science of early childhood development [shows the disproportionate impact the beginning of our lives](#) has on the rest of our lives. This holds true, among other things, for [economic inequality](#). Thus any attempt to ensure children’s rights, like those in the Children’s Rights Convention, must begin with family planning. Other interventions are simply too late. A statement from your office on child-centered family planning will emphasize its necessity.
- Better family planning is now understood to be an [effective way](#) to prevent the conditions that give rise to terrorism and other conflict-based threats to human rights and democracy. In today’s world, a new statement on this role for family planning is required.

Your statement on the current science and the need for a new ethic and a truly human rights-based approach to family planning is vital to recognizing family planning as [the most](#)

[effective long-term solution to many of today's problems](#). We need a family planning norm centered on maximizing the planning for and care of children. A child-first model based on giving all kids a fair start would advance all 17 of the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals.

The following is a framework for a possible statement:

The responsibilities referred to in the ICPD Programme of Action ensure progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Helping parents fulfill those responsibilities could be achieved through policies that, without discrimination or coercion, 1) encourage prospective parents to delay parenthood, 2) encourage communities and their governments to ensure all parents the resources they need to give their child equal opportunities in life relative to other children, as well as 3) encourage prospective parents to choose a smaller family so that they can invest more time and resources in each child.

We urge you to consider issuing a statement on family planning, one that accounts for the updated science, focuses on the needs of the child, and recognizes the unique role family planning plays in shaping the future of the world. In addition, we urge you to consider various possibilities for developing international frameworks for addressing population equitably and ethically, and implementing family planning principles to protect future generations.

Sincerely,

Erika and Willow





Having Kids is a 501(c)3 nonprofit nonprofit organization dedicated to reforming family planning by replacing parent-centered family planning models with the human rights-based and child-first Fair Start model.