



Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General
World Health Organization Headquarters in Geneva
Avenue Appia 20
1211 Geneva

Dear Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,

Having Kids is a nonprofit organization dedicated to replacing current subjective and parent-focused family planning models with the objective, human rights-based and child-focused [Fair Start model](#). We and other organizations have [asked the Secretary General of the United Nations](#) to speak out on the need for better family planning models that focus on delay, cooperation, and smaller families that invest more in each child. **We are writing to ask that you support this transition by speaking out.**

As the WHO has recognized, [overcrowding exacerbates epidemics](#) and is perhaps the most [fundamental threat to public health](#). Overpopulation is a [key factor in the spread of a variety of diseases](#), including coronavirus, yet this [driver is often ignored](#) in policymaking.

The facts are clear:

- The U.N. has issued world population [projections with massive variability](#).
- That variability is caused by the U.N.'s adherence [to a dangerously outdated family planning model](#) that ignores human rights and democracy.
- That variability will drastically impact the [threat that diseases pose to humanity](#) worldwide.

Hence, we are obligated to all advocate for better family planning modeling.

We need a universal family planning model that explicitly promotes smaller families that are equitable and sustainable. 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

as well as other and related environmental crises. [The evidence is clear](#).

Simply stated, the [current family planning model](#) used by the United Nations is the fundamental source of the problem, ensuring unsustainable population growth in a way that degrades equality, democracy, and our environment. This archaic model was developed before we learned what we know today about climate change, the disproportionate impact of early childhood development on human well-being, the way birth conditions and early childhood can exacerbate inequality, etc.

The current family planning model makes our future less secure, healthy, and equitable than it should be. Many better models have been proposed, including one by [leading political theorist Sarah Conly](#), and Having Kids' own model, [the Fair Start approach](#) (detailed [here](#)). To begin the process, we have [asked public figures to take action and speak out](#), but the United Nations should lead.

The United Nations continued adherence to the old model, despite its fundamental contribution to the degradation of our social and natural environment, is eroding the fabric of the international human-rights regime. Changing family planning models is [the most comprehensively effective solution to the world's greatest problems](#).

As the impacts of the climate crisis manifest and as studies confirm that simply improving access to family planning services will [not accomplish what was previously predicted](#), we face an urgent need to revisit the ethical models that underlie and drive family planning laws, policies, and funding. Can we do better than treating the act of bringing a child into the world as a matter parents decide in isolation from their community? We think so.

We believe Fair Start modeling [provides one cooperative path forward](#) and **that a public statement by the WHO regarding changing the underlying ethical modeling would be helpful**. We believe it would open the door for policies [like family planning delay and relocation payments](#), which under new modeling are more akin to entitlements for future children than incentives for parents.

More specifically, we are urging you, as heads of the key international organizations responsible for shaping family planning modeling, to speak out about the need for **a universal ethic of smaller families who cooperatively work together to give every child a fair start in life**. New modeling, which would require explicitly abandoning old modeling that treats family planning as a matter of parental privacy or autonomy, could be [the most effective solution](#) to many of the crises facing the world today.

A [child-first model](#), based on giving all kids a fair start in life, would advance [all 17](#) of the U.N.'s Sustainable Development Goals. The following is a framework for a possible statement:

The responsibilities noted in the ICPD Programme of Action ensure progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of the U.N. 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 in order to give their child equal opportunities in life relative to other children, and 3) encourage prospective parents to choose smaller families so that they can invest more time and resources in each child.

We believe new family planning modeling [could save countless lives](#).

The international community, including key United Nations agencies, requires minimum standards of care for children. But we don't apply those same standards in family planning models. Why not? Could we afford to do that, through future child entitlements, if we promoted a universal ethic of smaller families and shifted the savings? We think so.

- Several studies confirm that smaller families are the best way to confront climate change and other environmental crises. 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 start of our lives](#) has on our futures, including whether we'll face issues such as [economic inequality](#). Thus, any attempt to ensure children's rights, like those in the 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 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.

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 world's future.

Sincerely,

Erika Mathews
Executive Director

[Having Kids](#) is a 501(c)3 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. HavingKids.org | info@havingkids.org