



## **Open Letter to the Directors of the UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNEP: To Advance Children's Rights, Dissolve the Barrier Between Child Rights and Family Planning Policy**

Dear Directors Kanem, Russell, and Andersen,

We are writing to urge you to dissolve the barrier between family planning policies and children's rights policies.

Growth-biased policies both fail to take into account the needs of current children and harm future children, whose rights and well-being are increasingly under threat due to the worsening climate crisis,<sup>1</sup> resource depletion, rising inequality, unemployment, and political instability. In fact, the best interpretation of the Children's Convention ("CRC") considers the rights of future children just as much as the rights of children who exist today, which makes the Convention the centerpiece standard for family planning.<sup>2</sup>

The key to achieving just and sustainable family planning policies involves balancing procreative autonomy with procreative obligations, such that the rights of intending parents to have children are balanced with the rights and well-being of potential children. We need new norms that place children's rights at the center of every family planning decision, affirming the right of every child to enter a family and community that is prepared to provide for her physical and cognitive development, education, and health. Such norms, in turn, allow true adult autonomy or relative self-determination in the long run.

It's not about population/numbers. We either bring kids into select and safe conditions, or we are being fundamentally unjust.

### **We Have to Admit That Failure to Apply the Convention in Family Planning Hurt Women and Children**

Collectively, we have yet to reckon with birth rates and family size as drivers of the current crises in human and planetary health. While maternal and child welfare has improved worldwide, the reality is that outcomes are poor: costing the lives of nearly 300,000 women and over 5 million infants and children each year<sup>3</sup>. Recent studies, of course, do not reflect the horrific impacts the climate crisis will have on those outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See [Today's youth will face 'unmatched' climate extremes compared to older generations](#)

<sup>2</sup> See [Prospective Parents and the Children's Rights Convention \(american.edu\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> See [The U.S. Government and Global Maternal and Child Health Efforts | KFF](#)

<sup>4</sup> See [Climate change and the potential effects on maternal and pregnancy outcomes: an assessment of the most vulnerable--the mother, fetus, and newborn child - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#); [Climate change is a major stressor causing poor pregnancy outcomes and child development \(nih.gov\)](#); [The impacts of climate change put almost every child at risk | UNICEF](#);

These outcomes could have been avoided had family planning policies oriented around the objective needs of future children, like those specified in the Convention, rather than around the oft-cited “rights” of parents to have children<sup>5</sup>--including patriarchy, the preservation of oligarchic family structures, and the needs of population growth-based economies.<sup>6</sup> The reorientation could have easily been implemented by prioritizing child equity in family planning, and using progressive taxation on the wealthiest to fund family planning incentives and entitlements.<sup>7</sup> That change would have also moved the world towards more optimal and sustainable population levels, and allowed us to meet sustainable development goals and climate mitigation targets.<sup>8</sup>

Change begins with our admission that if children deserve certain things, then future children do as well. From this admission follows changing the policies that surround family planning and permissible birth/child development conditions, and moving from a parent-centric model based on autonomy (which ignores future child welfare) to a future child-centric model based on equity.<sup>9</sup>

Failure to do this is encourage men to use their wealth and positions of power to push women to have more children to be used as consumers, workers, and taxpayers. This degrades the capacity for participation each person would have in a functional democracy, and exacerbates the climate crisis. They want us to believe that one’s birth entry position – rich versus poor, in nurturing or horrific conditions – is a matter of fortune, or an act of god. Instead it is the absence of just family planning policies and the UNFPA’s failure to apply the Convention prospectively exacerbates this.

### **There Is a Clear Policy Pathway for Implementing Child-Centric Family Planning Policies to Comply with the Convention**

To develop the political will and the policy framework to advance these changes, we need a US federal entity to oversee children’s issues and advocate for children’s rights across all levels of government. Additionally, federal adoption of other key CRC principles – child impact statements and the best interests of the child standard for all budget and policy decisions – will advance children’s interests. Within this structure, the very initial steps towards dissolving the barrier between family planning and children’s rights will involve changing the discourse around family planning and the Convention in five specific ways:

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<sup>5</sup> See [A Human Rights Approach to Planning Families - Matthew Hamity, Carter Dillard, Sarah M. Bexell, Catharina Graff-Hughey, 2019 \(sagepub.com\)](#);

<sup>6</sup> See [Pronatalist Policies Are On The Rise \(refinery29.com\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> See [How Subsidizing Delayed Parenthood Will Let Children Lead the Way to a Fairer World | \(luc.edu\)](#); [Fair Start Movement: The Unite America Campaign | Fair Start Movement](#)

<sup>8</sup> See [A Planet of 3 Billion by Christopher Tucker – book extract | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](#); [Population and the Sustainable Development Goals | Population Matters](#); [World Failing to Achieve SDGs - Movendi International](#); [“Climate Commitments Not On Track to Meet Paris Agreement Goals” as NDC Synthesis Report is Published | UNFCCC](#)

<sup>9</sup> See [This Controversial Way to Combat Climate Change Might Be the Most Effective | Opinion \(newsweek.com\)](#)

First, we can adopt family planning policy reporting as part of ESG<sup>10</sup> disclosure frameworks.<sup>11</sup> This should include past, present, and anticipated policies. The inclusion as part of the framework would begin to create a culture among institutions - public and private - of factoring in family planning as the key driver or open multiplier of all crucial ESG impacts.

Second, we can urge the United Nations Human Rights Council to interpret Article 16 of the UDHR and relevant provisions of the international bill of human rights<sup>12</sup> as requiring just and sustainable family planning that can be practiced by all generations in perpetuity. This would require that reproductive rights be balanced with the obligations of intending parents towards potential children - current and future, with the understanding that future generations have the same human rights we do.

Third, we can urge the UN Secretary General, and heads of the UNFPA, UNICEF and UNEP,<sup>13</sup> to provide informal statements that support the reading of Article 16 above, and that treat the Convention as the centerpiece of family planning policies, capable of being implemented with the redistribution, incentive, and entitlement policies discussed above.<sup>14</sup> Informal statements lay the groundwork for changes at the level of population conventions, and eventually binding treaty interpretations.

Fourth, we should reorient more traditional reproductive rights frameworks that focus on preventing pregnancy around state obligations to ensure conditions that produce self-determining citizens rather than economic inputs in a system of unsustainable growth.<sup>15</sup> That state interest precedes and enables individual rights, creating the context in which they occur, but is currently absent from the discourse. Again, the focus here involves replacing procreative autonomy, which is a contradiction in terms, with procreative justice/equity, which in turn allows true adult autonomy or relative self-determination in the long run. While many might not readily accept that well-cared for kids make better citizens, that argument is based on a conceptual error. The people making it have a conception of good government that does not account for how the

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<sup>10</sup> ESG is the acronym for Environmental, Social, and (Corporate) Governance, the three broad categories or areas of interest for what is termed “socially responsible investors.” ESG concerns are growing as more of the millennial generation make up the total pool of investors.

<sup>11</sup> See [Justice Without a Fair Start in Life? Don't Fall for It. Help us Target Companies Greenwashing and Hurting Our Kids. \(fairstartmovement.org\)](https://www.fairstartmovement.org/)

<sup>12</sup> See [More Young People Don't Want Children Because of Climate Change. Has the UN Failed to Protect Them?](https://www.stableplanetalliance.org/_files/ugd/617966_286f92fddc244e759048c2240faf331a.pdf); see also [https://www.stableplanetalliance.org/\\_files/ugd/617966\\_286f92fddc244e759048c2240faf331a.pdf](https://www.stableplanetalliance.org/_files/ugd/617966_286f92fddc244e759048c2240faf331a.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> See <https://havingkids.org/uncandobetter/>

<sup>14</sup> See [Humane Families Coalition](https://www.fairstartmovement.org/).

<sup>15</sup> See [Texas Abortion Fight: A New Way Forward? | Fair Start Movement](https://www.fairstartmovement.org/); see also <https://iiseethics.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/feinberg-joel-the-rights-of-animals-and-unborn-generations1.pdf>

people in that system actually relate, e.g. how vastly disparate opportunities in life - which start at birth - carry over to disparate input in the political system.<sup>16</sup>

Fifth, we can begin to support true equity in birth and childhood development, honoring the ideal of equal opportunities in life, by reforming the child tax credit system to promote parental readiness, a leveling of the playing field for all children, and a universal ethic of smaller families.<sup>17</sup> As with the other reforms, this reform goes “upstream” to protect children by improving the conditions in which they are born and raised through redistribution of wealth as family planning incentives/entitlements, which are especially needed to offset - or help repair - the harm we have caused future generations.

## **Conclusion**

The US must appoint a high-level federal entity to ensure that US budget and policy decisions are adequately addressing and protecting the rights and interests of children. The best interpretation of the CRC applies it to future, and not just extant, children.

The Team at [Fair Start Movement](#)

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<sup>16</sup> See [Oligarchy in the United States? | Perspectives on Politics | Cambridge Core](#)

<sup>17</sup> See [Time for Antiracism in Biden's Family Plan? It's Called the Unite America Plan. | Fair Start Movement](#); see also [Rich Kids Stay Rich. Poor Kids Stay Poor | FiveThirtyEight](#)