



OPEN LETTER TO MR LIU ZHENMIN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS UN DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (UN-DESA)

Mr Under-Secretary-General,

28 February, 2022

The recent UN-DESA dialog on ["The Future of Population Growth"](#) placed much needed focus on family planning and human reproductive choices. These are some of the behavior choices that will define the future of our planet, our climate, our civilization.

The long-run [impact of population growth](#) and its accompanying resource demands on the climate crisis is exponential. This is why more than a third of [Nobel laureates surveyed](#) chose "population rise/ environmental degradation" as the biggest threat to humankind.

UN-DESA points out that further actions by governments to limit population growth would have relatively little effect on climate change between now and 2050, and recommends focusing on more resource-efficient consumption and production. Given the immediate need to lower emissions, addressing consumption makes significant sense. But it is no substitute for addressing population growth. Both are essential to tackle.

The creation and development of human beings is the fundamental driver from which all other anthropogenic impacts, including individual consumption, flow. They should therefore be a fundamental part of all policy initiatives and reforms, which must carefully consider the creation and development of the people who will be most impacted by them.

We therefore urge UN-DESA to adopt the following guidelines as it formulates its positions on population and consumption issues:

1. Instead of treating demographics/population and consumption as separate issues generating separate impacts, treat them as unified. It is impossible to separate the existence of people from the impacts they generate. Ignoring the need for family planning and related development policy reforms has only exacerbated the climate crisis and greatly impeded [progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#). We are not only falling short of emissions reductions targets, we are also increasing the number of emitters. Let's not keep making the same mistake.
2. Take a child-centric approach that prioritizes equitable and sustainable development, and the goals of the [Children's Rights Convention](#). Children (born and as yet unborn) are the ones who will be most impacted by the climate crisis. But it's important to remember that family planning and demographic issues are not solely about limiting negative human impacts. Effects are not limited to lowering emissions, or the broader environmental footprint of future generations (e.g. resource depletion, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation). Family planning and related development policies are also about positive human empowerment. They will help determine the resilience of future generations, and the capacity of those generations to engage in collective, creative, democratic solutions the planet needs.
3. To help frame more effective family planning and related development policy reforms, don't neglect to admit that past policies should have been better formulated with regard to demographic sustainability and human rights/autonomy. If Nobel laureates are citing population rise as the biggest threat to humankind, it means something clearly went wrong with family planning and related development policies. Ignoring it will make the problem worse. But acknowledging and correcting it would be powerful steps away from failed policies.

The UN could start by acknowledging that current population growth could be seriously exacerbated by strongly counterproductive pronatalist policies, as in [Poland](#), [Iran](#), [Russia](#), [China](#), the [United States](#), and [other countries](#).

These undermine reproductive autonomy while also disregarding the rights and needs of children.

We are living in perilous times. Every one of the roughly 80 million net new humans every year tips our planet closer to a dangerously destabilized planet, climate, and civilization. These children - and those yet unborn - do not deserve this. The UN has both the mandate and the responsibility to hold our global society's needs and rights in focus. It should challenge alarmist, demeaning, and self-interested baby-bust claims from economists and politicians seeking more children to grow economies, armies and voters - just as it did recently by [calling on Iran's government](#) to repeal its population growth plan.

The UN can, and must, show determined leadership on these threats to our civilization and planet.

Thank you sincerely,

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for Stable Planet Alliance
Bending the Curve on Population and Hyperconsumption

Representing 15 global organizations in population, economy and consumption, human wellbeing, media, environment and women's leadership

Stable Planet Alliance

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