

Call on COP26 for Urgent Action for Climate, Reproductive, and Intergenerational Justice

Recipients: President and Delegates of the UNFCCC 26th Conference of Parties

October 27, 2021

We call on the President and Delegates of the COP26 to take an urgent and clear public position recommending just and sustainable family planning to address rising global inequality, including gender inequity, and the climate crisis. Governments, NGOs, and major foundations are failing women, children and future generations. Without a universal effort towards equitable and sustainable family planning, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), FP2030 commitment, and Human Development Index benchmarks cannot be achieved, and human rights will continue to suffer.

Just and sustainable family planning is centered on human rights and accounts for the needs of women, children and of future generations - something that current family planning programmes across the globe fail to do. Family planning that is just and sustainable:

- Ensures equitable access to family planning and education
- Ensures equitable entitlements at birth
- Avoids coercive incentives that promote increased birth rates

These resources empower individuals and families and enable communities and governments to sustainably and equitably invest more in each child and protect their future, while upholding reproductive rights.

However, current political, religious, economic, and cultural pressures to increase births, and obstruct family planning programs, are driving our biggest crises and putting the health, safety, and welfare of current and future generations in peril. There are billions more humans on this planet than Earth can support in an ecologically sustainable way. [Unsustainable population growth, a documented threat multiplier](#), contributes to catastrophic climate change, unprecedented flooding, pandemics, ecosystem destruction, groundwater depletion, mass extinctions, and environmental degradation. Worsening inequality, in large part driven by our growing population, is also a grave threat to democracy and political stability across the globe.

The Right to Found a Family

Unfortunately, current family planning programmes and policies demonstrate that the UN misinterpreted the right to found a family under Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 16 should have been exercised in a way that protected all generations, those in the

middle of the 20th Century and those in 2050 equally. It should have also interpreted it consistent with other human rights obligations, [like the Children's Rights Convention](#), FP2030, as well as the SDGs.

Because of the conditions that we are creating today, [40% of young people](#) have expressed concerns about exercising their right to found a family. In other words, the UN failed to administer Article 16 correctly. In fact, it succumbed to member state pressures to maintain large and unsustainable families and population growth rates in the 20th century.

The Rights of Children and Intergenerational Justice

The misreading of Article 16 enabled pro-growth economic and pronatalist pressures to directly undermine the UN's clear commitment to the rights of children, sustainable development, and intergenerational justice. As things stand, younger and future generations face the prospect of significant reversals in human rights.

Mountains of evidence show that because of population-driven threats, children born today and in the future will live "[an unprecedented life](#)", facing "conditions which older generations have never experienced. According to the [most recent report from UNICEF](#), almost half the world's 2.2 billion children are already at "extremely high risk" from the impacts of the climate crisis and pollution. The inequities created by unsustainable growth policies have other significant impacts on children, such as the estimated [356 million children](#) who live in extreme poverty worldwide.

Pronatalist Coercion at the Heart of Reproductive Injustice

Religious and patriarchal pronatalist structures around the world, but especially in low and middle income countries, are mired in a type of population control that pressures women and girls into procreating. This reproductive oppression is in direct violation of Article 16. Approximately 270 million women worldwide (WHO) experience major barriers to family planning education and contraceptive uptake, rooted in fear and misinformation about contraception. Approximately 12 million girls under the age of 18 are forced into marriage and motherhood each year. That is 12 million girls who cannot consent to family planning decisions, thus being robbed not just of their childhood but of lifelong opportunities.

Baby-bust alarmism, another kind of pronatalism, has been on the rise in middle to high income countries. Growth-focused economists and politicians, some compounded with nationalistic agendas, are pressuring women to have more children by actively preventing access to family planning education, contraception and abortion services, in addition to offering baby-bonuses. Some examples of countries employing such alarmism to promote births include [China](#), [Iran](#), [Russia](#), [India](#), [Turkey](#), [Hungary](#), [Greece](#), [the US](#), and [Poland](#). In addition to violating reproductive rights, such pronatalist pressures view babies as commodities without much regard for their welfare needs.

Applying Just and Sustainable Family Planning

The global community has failed to inform and support reproductive decisions that promote healthy and sustainable ecosystems and equitable prosperity.

The best way to compensate young people and future generations for this violation of their rights is by [properly interpreting Article 16 and by transferring resources in an equitable manner](#) to ensure that all children are born into just conditions. Such a family planning model would explore what entitlements we can create to benefit that cohort of future peoples and a world that puts children first on a fair start to a path forward. Given the special nature of Article 16, when properly interpreted, [it should be read as specially peremptory](#).

Why the UN Must Lead

Governments and community institutions have a responsibility to promote sustainable and equitable investments in family planning and families by educating about the benefits of delayed parenthood, birth spacing, and smaller families (for those who choose to have children). These benefits include greater financial stability and health, better social and emotional outcomes, higher standards of living, greater women's empowerment, greater investment in each child, and a more sustainable planet.

A declaration by the President and Delegates of COP26 would be a powerful step to dispel the myths that underpin harmful pronatalism and challenge the reluctance to address the issue of unsustainable population growth more broadly. A statement would also elevate discussions on the needs and wellbeing of children and future generations. The President of COP26 could also usefully acknowledge the urgency of substantial investment in comprehensive and equitable family planning programs. These should be emphasized not only as a means of supporting the realization of individual rights but also as advancing the legitimate goal of creating equitable and sustainable birth conditions.

The United Nations has been criticized for not intervening to protect human rights in other contexts. This negligence has already resulted in calamitous consequences for our planet and our species. It is therefore imperative that the UN call on governments, NGOs, and major foundations to promote equitable and sustainable family planning to ensure intergenerational justice and achieve true liberation for people, especially women and children.



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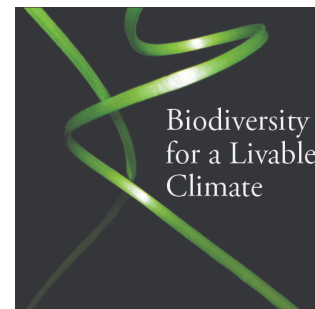
SIGNATORIES



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EarthOvershoot



Selected Activists and Academics

1. Dotsie Bausch, United States Olympian
2. Stan Becker, Professor Emeritus, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
3. Phoebe Barnard, Chief Scientific and Policy Officer for the Conservation Biology Institute
4. Sarah Bexell, Clinical Associate Professor, University of Denver
5. Michelle Blake, Owner, WiderChange LLC
6. Mary Pat Champeau, Director of Graduate Programs, Institute for Humane Education
7. Aalok Chaurasia, President, MLC Foundation, India
8. Sarah Conly, Professor Emerita, Bowdoin College
9. Elisabeth Dimitras, Founder and Director, Ethos & Empathy
10. Dave Gardner, President, GrowthBusters
11. Benjamin Eitelberg, Co-Founder, The Lentil Intervention
12. Seeta Durjan Esmailbegui, CEO, Seetamedia
13. Wills Flowers, Professor Emeritus, Florida A&M University
14. Alisha Graves, Executive Director, OASIS
15. John Paul Délano Frier, Research Professor, Centro de Investigación y de Estudios Avanzados, unidad Irapuato
16. Frank Götmark, Professor of Ecology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
17. Ryan Gourley, International Director of Operations, Animal Equality
18. Richard Grossman, MD, OBGYN, Durango, Colorado
19. Maureen Cohen Harrington, Special Projects Manager, Fair Start Movement
20. Deborah Iliffe, Investor, Impactirr
21. Gyula I. G. Józsa, Scientist, International Astronomical Union
22. Cailen LaBarge, Executive Director, Strategies for Ethical and Environmental Development
23. Bill Lawrence, Distinguished Professor, James Cook University, Australia
24. Lilia Mannes, Regional Organizer, Midwest US, Mercy For Animals
25. Alejandra Manzanares, Director, La Casa de Los Tlacuaches
26. Nancy Marshall, Author, Quaker Earthcare Witness Population group
27. Jo-Anne McArthur, Founder and President, We Animals Media
28. Brian McGavin, Director, Scientists Warning Europe
29. Tushar Mehta, Director, Plant Based Data
30. Eric Mills, Coordinator, Action for Animals

31. Leilani Munter, Professional Race Car Driver and Environmental Activist
32. Ariel Nessel, Founder and President, The Pollination Project
33. Christine Overall, Professor Emerita, Queen's University
34. Sofia Pineda Ochoa, Director, Meat Your Future
35. William Ripple, Distinguished Professor of Ecology, Oregon State University
36. Jane Roberts, Founder, 34 Million Friends of the U.N. Population Fund
37. Jean Ross, Board President, Vote Climate
38. Megan Seibert, Executive Director, The REAL Green New Deal Project
39. Lisa Sharpe, Lecturer in Biology and Conservationist
40. Therese Shechter, Filmmaker, Trixie Films
41. James Strittholt, President/Executive Director, Conservation Biology Institute
42. Jane O'Sullivan, Honorary Senior Fellow, Faculty of Science, The University of Queensland
43. Alexandra Paul, Actress, Activist, and Educator
44. Jem Randles, Campaigns Director, Population Counts
45. William Rees. Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia
46. Paul Sutton, Professor of Geography and the Environment, University of Denver
47. Seth Tibbott, Founder and Chairman, The Tofurky Company
48. Joyce Tischler, Professor of Practice, Animal Law Center for Animal Law Studies at Lewis & Clark Law School
49. Pamela Thinesen, Educator, Century College
50. Peter Uetz, Associate Professor, Virginia Commonwealth University
51. Clifton Ware, Emeritus Professor of Vocal Music, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities