



POLICY STATEMENT
OF
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AT THE
UNITED NATIONS
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POLICY STATEMENT: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION.

INTRODUCTION

For many years, the United States has supported, and helped to finance, programs of family planning, particularly in developing countries. This Administration has continued that support but has placed it within a policy context different from that of the past. It is sufficiently evident that the current exponential growth in global population cannot continue indefinitely. There is no question of the ultimate need to achieve a condition of population equilibrium. The differences that do exist concern the choice of strategies and methods for the achievement of that goal. The experience of the last two decades not only makes possible but requires a sharper focus for our population policy. It requires a more refined approach to problems which appear today in quite a different light than they did twenty years ago.

First and most important, population growth is, of itself, a neutral phenomenon. It is not necessarily good or ill. It becomes an asset or a problem only in conjunction with other factors, such as economic policy, social constraints, need for manpower, and so forth. The relationship between population growth and economic development is not necessarily a negative one. More people do not necessarily mean less growth. Indeed, in the economic history of many nations, population growth has been an essential element in economic progress.

Before the advent of governmental population programs, several factors had combined to create an unprecedented surge in population over most of the world. Although population levels in many industrialized nations had reached or were approaching equilibrium in the period before the Second World War, the baby boom that followed in its wake resulted in a dramatic, but temporary, population “tilt” toward youth. The disproportionate number of infants, children, teenagers, and eventually young adults, did strain the social infrastructure of schools, health facilities, law enforcement, and so forth. However, it also helped sustain strong economic growth, despite occasionally counterproductive government policies.

Among the developing nations, a coincidental population increase was caused by entirely different factors. A tremendous expansion of health services – from simple inoculations to sophisticated surgery – saved millions of lives every year. Emergency relief, facilitated by modern transport, helped millions to survive flood, famine, and drought. The sharing of technology, the teaching of

agriculture and [page 2] engineering and improvements in educational standards generally, all helped to reduce mortality rates, especially infant mortality, and to lengthen life spans.

This demonstrated not poor planning or bad policy but human progress in a new era of international assistance, technological advance, and human compassion. The population boom was a challenge; it need not have been a crisis. Seen in its broader context, it required a measured, modulated response. It provoked an overreaction by some, largely, because it coincided with two negative factors which, together, hindered families and nations in adapting to their changing circumstances.

The first of these factors was governmental control of economies, a development which effectively constrained economic growth. The post-war experience consistently demonstrated that, as economic decision-making was concentrated in the hands of planners and public officials, the ability of average men and women to work towards a better future was impaired, and sometimes crippled. In many cases, agriculture was devastated by government price-fixing that wiped out rewards for labor. Job creation in infant industries was hampered by confiscatory taxes. Personal industry and thrift were penalized, while dependence upon the state was encouraged. Political considerations made it difficult for an economy to adjust to changes in supply and demand or to disruptions in world trade and finance. Under such circumstances, population growth changed from an asset in the development of economic potential to a peril.

One of the consequences of this "economic statism" was that it disrupted the natural mechanism for slowing population growth in problem areas. The world's more affluent nations have reached a population equilibrium without compulsion and, in most cases, even before it was government policy to achieve it. The controlling factor in these cases has been the adjustment, by individual families, of reproductive behavior to economic opportunity and aspiration. Historically, as opportunities and the standard of living rise, the birth rate falls. In many countries, economic freedom has led to economically rational behavior.

That pattern might be well under way in many nations where population growth is today a problem, if counterproductive government policies had not disrupted economic incentives, rewards, and advancement. In this regard, localized crises of population growth are, in part, evidence of too much government control and planning, rather than too little. [page 3]

The second factor that turned the population boom into a crisis was confined to the western world. It was an outbreak of an anti-intellectualism, which attacked science, technology, and the very concept of material progress. Joined to a commendable and long overdue concern for the environment, it was more a reflection of anxiety about unsettled times and an uncertain future. In its disregard of human experience and scientific sophistication, it was not unlike other waves of cultural anxiety that have swept through western civilization during times of social stress and scientific exploration.

The combination of these two factors — counterproductive economic policies in poor and struggling nations, and a pessimism among the more advanced — led to a demographic overreaction in the 1960's and 1970's. Scientific forecasts were required to compete with unsound, extremist scenarios, and too many governments pursued population control measures without sound economic policies that create the rise in living standards historically associated with decline in fertility rates. This approach has not worked, primarily because it has focused on a symptom and neglected the underlying ailments. For the last three years, this Administration has sought to reverse that approach. We recognize that, in some cases, immediate population pressures may require short-term efforts to ameliorate them. But population control programs alone cannot substitute for the economic reforms that put a society on the road toward growth and, as an aftereffect, toward slower population increase as well.

Nor can population control substitute for the rapid and responsible development of natural resources. In commenting on the Global 2000 report, this Administration in 1981 disagreed with its call 'for more governmental supervision and control, stating that:

'Historically, that has tended to restrict the availability of resources and to hamper the development of technology, rather than to assist it. Recognizing the seriousness of environmental and economic problems, and their relationship to social and political pressures, especially in the developing nations, the Administration places a priority upon technological advance and economic expansion, which hold out the hope of prosperity and stability of a rapidly changing world. That hope can be realized, of course, only to the extent that government's response to problems, whether economic or 'ecological, respects and enhances individual freedom, which make true progress possible and worthwhile.'

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Those principles underlie this country's approach to the International Conference on Population to be held in Mexico City in August.

POLICY OBJECTIVES

The world's rapid population growth is a recent phenomenon. Only several decades ago, the population of developing countries was relatively stable, the result of a balance between high fertility and high mortality. There are now 4.5 billion people in the world, and six billion are projected by the year 2000. Such rapid growth places tremendous pressures on governments without concomitant economic growth.

The International Conference on Population offers the U.S. an opportunity to strengthen the international consensus on the interrelationships between economic development and population, which has emerged since the last such conference in Bucharest in 1974. Our primary objective will be to encourage developing countries to adopt sound economic policies and, where appropriate, population policies consistent with respect for human dignity and family values. As President Reagan stated in his message to the Mexico City Conference:

'We believe population programs can and must be truly voluntary, cognizant of the rights and responsibilities of individuals and families, and respectful of religious and cultural values. When they are, such programs can make an important contribution to economic and social development, to the health of mothers and children, and to the stability of the family and of society. '

U.S. support for family planning programs is based on respect for human life, enhancement of human dignity, and strengthening of the family. Attempts to use abortion, involuntary sterilization, or other coercive measures in family planning must be shunned, whether exercised against families within a society or against nations within the family of man.

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) calls for legal protection for children before birth as well as after birth. In keeping with this obligation, the United States does not consider abortion an acceptable element of family planning programs and will no longer contribute to those of which it is a part. Accordingly, when dealing with nations which support abortion with funds not provided by the [page 5] United States Government, the United States will contribute to such nations through segregated accounts which cannot be used for abortion. Moreover, the United States will no longer contribute to separate nongovernmental organizations which perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning in other nations. With regard to the

United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the U.S. will insist that no part of its contribution be used for abortion. The U.S. will also call for concrete assurances that the UNFPA is not engaged in, or does not provide funding for, abortion or coercive family planning programs; if such assurances are not forthcoming, the U.S. will redirect the amount of its contribution to other, non-UNFPA, family planning programs.

In addition, when efforts to lower population growth are deemed advisable, U.S. policy considers it imperative that such efforts respect the religious beliefs and culture of each society, and the right of couples to determine the size of their own families. Accordingly, the U.S. will not provide family planning funds to any nation which engages in forcible coercion to achieve population growth objectives.

U.S. Government authorities will immediately begin negotiations to implement the above policies with the appropriate governments and organizations.

It is time to put additional emphasis upon those root problems which frequently exacerbate population pressures, but which have too often been given scant attention. By focusing upon real remedies for underdeveloped economies, the International Conference on Population can reduce demographic issues to their proper place. It is an important place, but not the controlling one. It requires our continuing attention within the broader context of economic growth and of the economic freedom that is its prerequisite.

POPULATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND ECONOMIC POLICIES

Conservative projections indicate that, in the sixty years from 1950 to 2010, many Third World countries will experience four-, five-, or even six-fold increases in the size of their populations. Even under the assumption of gradual declines in birth rates, the unusually high proportion of youth in the Third World means that the annual population growth in many of these countries will continue to increase for the next several decades. [page 6]

Sound economic policies and a market economy are of fundamental importance to the process of economic development. Rising standards of living contributed in a major way to the demographic transition from high to low rates of population growth which occurred in the U.S. and other industrialized countries over the last century.

The current situation of many developing countries, however, differs in certain ways from conditions in 19th century Europe and the U.S. The rates and dimensions of population growth are much higher now, the pressures on land, water, and resources are greater, the safety-valve of migration is more restricted, and, perhaps most important, time is not on their side because of the momentum of demographic change.

Rapid population growth compounds already serious problems faced by both public and private sectors in accommodating changing social and economic demands. It diverts resources from needed investment, and increases the costs and difficulties of economic development. Slowing population growth is not a panacea for the problems of social and economic development. It is not offered as a substitute for sound and comprehensive development policies which encourage a vital private sector, it cannot solve problems of hunger, unemployment, crowding, or social disorder.

Population assistance is an ingredient of a comprehensive program that focuses on the root causes of development failures. The U.S. program as a whole, including population assistance, lays the basis for well-grounded, step-by-step initiatives to improve the well-being of people in developing countries and to make their own efforts, particularly through expanded private sector initiatives, a key building block of development programs.

Fortunately, a broad international consensus has emerged since the 1974 Bucharest World Population Conference that economic development and population policies are mutually reinforcing.

By helping developing countries slow their population growth through support for effective voluntary family planning programs, in conjunction with sound economic policies, U.S. population assistance contributes to stronger saving and investment rates, speeds the development of effective markets and related employment opportunities, reduces the potential resource requirements of programs to improve the health and education of the people, and hastens the achievement of each country's graduation from the need for external assistance.
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The United States will continue its long-standing commitment to development assistance, of which population programs are a part. We recognize the importance of providing our assistance within the cultural, economic, and political context of the countries we are assisting, and in keeping with our own values.

HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS

Perhaps the most poignant consequence of rapid population growth is its effect on the health of mothers and children. Especially in poor countries, the health and nutrition status of women and children is linked to family size. Maternal and infant mortality rises with the number of births and with births too closely spaced. In countries as different as Turkey, Peru, and Nepal, a child born less than two years after its sibling is twice as likely to die before it reaches the age of five, than if there were an interval of at least four years between the births. Complications of pregnancy are more frequent among women who are very young or near the end of their reproductive years. In societies with widespread malnutrition and inadequate health conditions, these problems are reinforced; numerous and closely spaced births lead to even greater malnutrition of mothers and infants.

It is an unfortunate reality that, in many countries, abortion is used as a means of terminating unwanted pregnancies. This is unnecessary and repugnant; voluntary family assistance programs can provide a humane alternative to abortion for couples who wish to regulate the size of their family, and evidence from some developing countries indicates a decline in abortion as such services become available.

The basic objective of all U.S. assistance, including population programs, is the betterment of the human condition – improving the quality of life of mothers and children, of families, and of communities for generations to come. For we recognize that people are the ultimate resource – but this means happy and healthy children, growing up with education, finding productive work as young adults, and able to develop their full mental and physical potential.

U.S. aid is designed to promote economic progress in developing countries through encouraging sound economic policies and freeing of individual initiative. Thus, the U.S. supports a broad range of activities in various sectors, including agriculture, private enterprise, science and technology, health, population, and education. Population assistance amounts to about ten percent of total development assistance. [page 8]

TECHNOLOGY AS A KEY TO DEVELOPMENT

The transfer, adaptation, and improvement of modern know-how is central to U.S. development assistance. People with greater know-how are people better able to improve their lives. Population assistance ensures that a wide range of modern demographic technology is made available to developing countries and that technological improvements critical for successful development receive support.

The efficient collection, processing, and analysis of data derived from census, survey, and vital statistics programs contribute to better planning in both the public and private sectors.