



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 December 2013

Original: English

Commission on Population and Development

Forty-seventh session

7-11 April 2014

General debate on national experience in population matters: assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

Statement submitted by Alliance Defense Fund, Asociacion Gilberto, Mujer para la Mujer, Observatorio Regional para la Mujer de América Latina y el Caribe, Red Mujeres, Desarrollo, Justicia y Paz and Vida y Familia de Guadalajara, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The Alliance is a not-for-profit international legal alliance of more than 2,200 lawyers dedicated to the protection of fundamental human rights. It has been involved in over 500 cases before national and international forums, including the Supreme Courts of Argentina, Honduras, India, Mexico, Peru and the United States of America, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights. It has also provided expert testimony before several European parliaments, as well as the European Parliament and the United States Congress. It has accreditation with the Economic and Social Council, as well as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union (the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the European Parliament).

Vida y Familia de Guadalajara is a private Mexican welfare institution that cares for socioeconomically vulnerable pregnant women and helps them achieve postnatal social integration through education and skill building. Mujer para la Mujer is a non-governmental organization that works to promote the fundamental human rights of women, with a focus on improving the lives of rural women of the various indigenous communities in Mexico. Construye is a Mexican non-governmental organization that highlights the value of women in the professional, social and family spheres through the compilation of information, the exchange of better practices and the promotion of men's and women's development. Asociacion Gilberto is a Mexican non-governmental organization that seeks to provide help, support and livelihood to the most disadvantaged within the population, providing quality services according to the needs of the communities that they serve, including education and skills training to improve quality of life. Red Mujeres, Desarrollo, Justicia y Paz works in 28 states in Mexico and serves to empower women through trainings in business and finance to more effectively contribute to their families, communities and country.

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development, we call upon Member States at the forty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development to reaffirm our immutable human rights with a particular focus on authentic solutions to development that prioritize the needs of the person. Person-centred solutions focus on harnessing human ingenuity to drive development. It is imperative that the United Nations reaffirm principle 2 of the Programme of Action of the International Conference, which states that people are the most important valuable resource of any nation.

The needs of human beings are the priority when considering sustainable development. All too often, false responses to sustainable development lead to calls for smaller family size, which run contrary to international law. We urge Member States to reaffirm the language of the International Conference on Population and Development, which strongly condemns all forms of coercion in population policies. In accordance with the inherent dignity of the person and in the interest of lasting development, we must shift the focus away from policies that present a negative view of the person and towards truly progressive policies that channel the innate creativity of the person to cultivate real and enduring development. Negative policies that focus inordinately on smaller populations, by way of family planning and access to abortion, violate the right of every person to determine his or her family size free of government interference. Moreover, such policies in no way

contribute to development. Smaller families do not result in greater levels of development. For development to manifest, we must tackle the root causes of underdevelopment, including poverty, corruption, scarcity and all other obstacles that stand in the way of growth. Authentic development results from achieving conditions in which every individual can flourish.

Paul Ehrlich's 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*, made the argument that overpopulation would lead to mass starvation. This never happened. We now face a distinct but equally disastrous fate — a demographic time bomb. In much of the world, low birth rates have resulted in an increasingly ageing population and fewer young people to support older generations and drive development. This is not the time to call for smaller family size. On the contrary, this is the time to celebrate the unique contributions of every person on the planet and, in particular, young people, who are uniquely equipped to drive development. We applaud the legacy of the International Conference on Population and Development, which has made it clear that abortion is not to be promoted as a method of family planning (Programme of Action, para. 7.24) and that it is the sovereign right of a State to determine its own laws on abortion (*ibid.*, para. 8.25). In accordance with the International Conference, we call upon Member States to highlight the fact that people represent our greatest resource for development and to underscore the value of thriving, vibrant populations for sustainable development.

The International Conference on Population and Development calls upon Governments to promote to the fullest extent the needs of children and young people as representing the world's future human resources (*ibid.*, para. 6.7). Children are most likely to reach their potential if they have the benefit of a stable family. Strong families are necessary for strong, healthy children, who in turn build strong communities. Given the vitally important role of the family in the care and education of children, it follows that States must afford families the widest possible protection and assistance, as noted in article 10.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Education is an essential solution to the problem of poverty, and families have a major influence on their children's achievements in school and throughout life. Growing scientific evidence affirms that a child's family relationships are essential to improving his or her level of education. Recent studies confirm that the more involved parents are in their child's education, the more likely it is that the child will succeed academically. In fact, the best indication of a student's success is not income or social status, but the extent to which the student's family is involved. Children with involved parents, regardless of their income or background, are more likely to attend school regularly, have better social skills, earn high grades and go on to post-secondary education.

Families depend on the protections and freedoms that Governments provide. Governments, in turn, depend on families to raise healthy, engaged children who will develop into concerned citizens and positively contribute to society. But the ultimate ability of children to make positive contributions greatly depends on the opportunities afforded to them. Poverty can be a crippling obstacle to the ability of a family to provide for children. We commend the United Nations for revisiting the International Conference on Population and Development and for its commitment to sustainable development. The greater the economic resources available to a family, the greater the freedom it has to explore educational opportunities for its children.

This in turn leads to more educated youth who are better equipped to capitalize on economic opportunities and contribute to the flourishing of society.

Conclusion

The twentieth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development falls on the same year as the International Year of the Family. The intersection of these two significant events points to the fact that sustainable development is not possible without attention to the vital role of the family. This is a critical opportunity for the United Nations to condemn coercive population targets and to prioritize a view of the person as the driver of development — a task that was undertaken 20 years ago in Cairo and continues today. Focusing instead on creating conditions conducive to human flourishing and encouraging strong family structures will have the effect of providing young people with the opportunities that they need to contribute to lasting sustainable development.
