

Declaration of People's Perspectives on "Population" Symposium

Between December 12 and 15 of 1993, 61 women from 23 countries from around the world met in Comilla, Bangladesh, to build and ratify a collective position on population-control programs and policies. The international symposium, Peoples Perspectives on "Population", explored a wide range of related issues such as environmental degradation, The New Economic World Order, emergent policies (especially the upcoming International Conference on Population and development, Cairo, 1994), genetic engineering and language. This document is a feminist critique of the logic of domination that underlies population control policies.

We oppose population control because.

Population control policies are designed to control the bodies, the fertility and the lives of women: because it is women who bear children.

Population policies have in built racist and eugenic ideologies through the process of selection of the ones who have the right to survive and dismissing everyone else, such as the indigenous, the disabled and the black. They have the goal to eliminate the poor instead of poverty.

Population policies represent the interests of the privileged elites and a lifestyle of over-consumption in the countries of the North as well as of the elites in the Third World.

There cannot be any feminist population policies because it violates and contradicts the basic premise of feminism.

Population-control programs are based on international collaboration between organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development, the Population Council, Rockefeller and Ford Foundation, United Nations Fund for Population Activities, and pharmaceutical multinationals. The World Health Organization's Human Reproduction program facilitates such collaborations.

These agencies are now attempting to set the agenda for women's movements and organizations by co-opting their language and individual women to legitimize population -control policies. Although this co-optation plays a very decisive role and confuses issues, many women around the world are resisting this.

Language and Representation

Population control programs were devised already in the 1950s in the name of "poverty eradication" and containment of communism. Today they are used, supposedly, to curb environmental destruction and to ensure 'sustainable growth'. In fact, however, all over the years these programs have subjected women in the South to a whole range of coercive technologies and methods which have often ruined their health and their lives.

The population establishment attempts to hide these horrors by cloaking them in words hijacked from the women's liberation movement, and thus try to convey the message that they fall within an ethic of care and human rights; and that they expand "reproductive choice", especially for women.

Language is meant to reflect people's reality and history. Therefore we reclaim words and phrases that have been appropriated because they are part of our movement's history. It is part of our resistance to create a language which expresses our visions as well as women's reality.

Our resistance to population-control policies must never be confused with the opposition of the religious and political right to the same policies.

We reject the term "poor" as it is usually applied to Third World Countries as they have wealth which is exploited by industrialist and capitalist concerns. We object the term "carrying capacity" as a tool which enables the objectification of people and nature.

We reject the term "population": people are not demographic variables. That's why our critical reflection on "population" starts with putting the word in inverted commas.

In the present global discourse the term "democracy" usually stands for capitalism and gives false hopes and expectations to people namely the access for all to the global supermarket.

We demand respect for the integrity of women's body, outside the confines of compulsory heterosexuality, while the religious right and fundamentalists give primacy to the lives of fetuses, compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood.

The media have consistently equated economic and political crises in the Third World to "population explosions". We reject such media images which maintain the domination by the Northern and Southern collaborators, of the South.

We will demystify these terms and see to it that the interests camouflaged by this

language will be brought into the open.

The New Economic World Order

We are now living in a neocolonial period. Despite the fact that the colonizing powers were forced by people's resistance and national liberation movements to allow so-called "political" independence in Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Economic dependence and external and internal colonialism continued. The new colonial institutions such as IMF and World Bank have maintained the colonizers' power.

After the oil crises, credit based development was promoted in the South. It failed and ended in the debt crisis. To solve this crisis the World Bank introduced so-called Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). In the name of Structural Adjustment Programs, World Bank and International Monetary Fund dictated prescriptions in which the third world countries have to sacrifice health and food subsidies. Their public health and welfare infrastructure are systematically dismantled and privatized. These reduced health delivery services are technologized and virtually reduced to instruments of population control. The poor, and particularly poor women, are the main victims of this global policy everywhere.

Another aspect of this new world order is the further globalization of the world market system. The General Agreement of Tariff and Trade (GATT) signed in December 1993, intends to open up the economies of the South, particularly their agricultural sector to multinationals and biotechnology sector. Through the regime of Intellectual Property Right the privatization and commodification of all lives is intended.

With the ecological and economic crisis deepening the old colonial methods of naked violence and repression is used when needed, such as the Gulf War to ensure control of resources. It is clear that population control strategies are central to this strategy. They are continuation of war in disguise.

This remilitarization of the world has also reinforced patriarchal structures and attitudes such as violence against women, mass rapes in wars and general brutalization of everyday life. Commodification and trafficking of women are increasing.

The globalization of the world market economy has shifted and blurred boundaries between the North and the Third World. What we used to understand

as the Third World (under-developed, poor) is no longer concentrated only in the South of the Planet. Poverty is also increasing and becoming a permanent feature in Northern and industrialized countries.

This globalization of the world market economy also leads to a concentration of wealth in the hands of ever fewer people and to a polarization of the societies, particularly of the South. But in many parts of the world people are actively resisting this destruction of the basis of their lives. In this process they often develop visions which go beyond the capitalist-patriarchal growth model.

Environment

The growth oriented development model has led to severe environmental degradation in most parts of the world, which have, in turn, undermined people's security and livelihoods. We reject the prevalent notion that "over-population" has a causal connection with environmental degradation.

The North, with 20% of the world's people, consumes 80% of the total resources. One of the key factors causing environmental destruction is the excessive use of energy in production and consumption. This energy is based on non-sustainable resources such as petrochemical, coal and nuclear energies. These resources are depletable and the extraction processes themselves destroy the environment. The use of such forms of energy is essential to the development of high technology which perpetuates the growth oriented development. Over-consumption in the North cannot be isolated from production patterns and technological processes, nor from the forces creating "consumer demands".

Migration

The growth oriented development model has increased the number of poverty, environmental and political migrants and refugees. Interference of world powers with the active collaboration of the lucrative and growing armament industries has led to war, while low intensity conflict has led to further displacement of people as war refugees. The demands of capitalism also direct the movement of low-wage laborers.

The phobia of overpopulation has not only distracted policies from the actual causes of migration, but has further victimized the victims. 65% migrants and 90% of refugees are women and children. The Northern countries in response to

migration issues are making stricter laws to close the borders, while in the new free market economy, the resources and capital are flowing freely from the South to the North, dragging migrant and low wage workers with them.

Double standards are practiced when it comes to the movement of the world's citizens between those who are welcome and can afford to move freely and those who are shunned or exploited for their labor. With the signing of GATT, goods can move without restriction whereas migration remains constrained.

Reproductive Science and Reproductive Technologies

Reproductive technology has been developed to control women's procreative capacity. For women in the South, population controllers promote longer acting injectable or implantable contraceptives that leave women as little room as possible to resist contraception should they want to bear a child. A woman can "forget" to take the Pill but once NORPLANT is inside the body, she cannot remove it herself. These maximum control contraceptives manipulate women's hormonal and immune systems effecting in long-term changes in their bodies. Ever since the "Pill" - originally placed in the market on the basis of tests on a tiny number of Puerto Rican women, five of whom died during the testing, population controllers attention to contraceptive safety has been minimal. There is an extensive literature critiquing the shoddy science used to show the alleged safety of various contraceptives, particularly Depo-Provera, NORPLANT, the anti-pregnancy vaccine, and RU-486.

In the North, reproductive technologies serve a pro-natalist, rather than an anti-natalist goal. For example, in Japan, Quebec (Canada) and elsewhere, where the fertility rate has fallen, government and media are conducting a scare campaign that the "population" is endangered by this fall. This campaign, along with the notion that motherhood must be central to women's lives, places pressure on women to have a child.

Many women turn to 'In Vitro' fertilization, promoted as highly effective though its failure rate is in fact 90 percent.

Increasingly technologies are invented that are controlled by the provider, that is, the physicians, the drug companies, the state. Formerly, contraceptives, like the diaphragm, were more under the control of women (user-controlled). Whether in relation to curbing or enhancing fertility, these provider-controlled technologies effectively undermine women's control over their lives by burdening them with full responsibility for fertility and absolving men of their responsibility.

Therefore, long-acting contraceptives like NORPLANT are not an advance in contraceptive technology but an advance in control. They are purposeful instruments inspired by eugenicists whose programs of population control were designed explicitly to curtail the number of black, indigenous, disabled and poor white peoples.

We note with special concern the situation of indigenous peoples in various countries who are subjected to coercive methods of fertility control in order to appropriate their land, their commons, their culture. Their traditional family planning and health practices are discarded in favor of modern technology and practices that result in their extermination.

We are deeply concerned about the plight of people with disabilities who are often subjected to physical abuse and are being used for experimentation and implementation for contraceptive drugs and devices such as Depo-Provera and NORPLANT. Prenatal testing and embryo biopsy is aimed at determining who is worthy of being born.

Therefore we say no to amniocentesis; no to sex determination; no to embryo biopsy and the in vitro fertilization technology that makes human embryos available for manipulation.

We further oppose the industrialization and commercialization of reproduction in the surrogate mother; in vitro fertilization, and sex pre-determination clinics opened by new entrepreneurs.

UN-Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)

In September 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which is largely funded by the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), will take place in Cairo, Egypt. This conference will pave the way for more population-control policies in the coming decade, based on the false assumption that population growth threatens the survival of the planet.

We must reveal the underlying aims being set for the ICPD, which include the myth that the population growth of the South is the problem, while obscuring over-consumption and the wasteful lifestyle of the rich and the elites of the world.

Women's Needs

Women's basic needs of food, education, health, work, social and political participation, a life free of violence and oppression should be addressed on their own merit. Meeting Women's need should be de-linked from population policy including those expressed as apparent humanitarian concerns for women. Women should have access to safe contraception and legal abortion under broader health care. These needs can only be met if all life is respected and accorded dignity. We demand an end to exploitation of people and the earth.

For all these reasons, we state again that we oppose population-control policies in all forms. Also there cannot be a feminist population control policy. Our voices cannot be used to legitimize a anti-women, anti-poor, anti-nature population policy.

People are not "population"

Population control: NO!

People's Perspectives on "Population"

Text for the press released in a press conference after the Symposium. The press conference took place on December 20, 1993 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Between December 12 to 15 of 1993 sixty-five women from 24 countries from all around the world met in Comilla, Bangladesh, in a symposium "People's Perspective on 'Population'". The aim of the meeting was to discuss and formulate a feminist position regarding the myth spread all over the world that population growth is the main cause of ongoing and increasing poverty and environmental destruction. This propaganda not only puts the blame on poor people, especially on women, but also makes them the main target for population control policies.

The participants expect that this propaganda will be intensified and false representation of reality will be greatly aggravated before and during the upcoming INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT (ICPD) '94 in Cairo, in September, 1994.

The reality, however, is that population control policies are based on eugenic principles to ensure that the world's resources benefit only the elites of the North and South and thus form part and parcel of the racist strategies to eliminate the poor and the people of color. This blatant racism incorporated into the very

structures of capitalist-patriarchy is now reframed as the New Economic World Order, developed in the wake of the debt crisis, the Gulf War and the present economic recession.

The present era is indeed a continuation of colonialism in different forms and all life forms are being "colonized" more nakedly than before under the Intellectual Property Right regime. The new colonial institutions such as IMF and World Bank have maintained the colonizers' power, while Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and agreements like GATT have increased the economic and political stranglehold of the Industrial North over the South. The old colonial method of naked violence and aggression is used when needed, such as the Gulf War. It is not a surprise, therefore, that the population control establishment works in collaboration with neo-colonial global institutions such as the World Bank and IMF., foreign policy implementation agencies of the Northern powers such as USAID, corporate foundations such as Ford and Rockefeller, Population Council, IPPF and the multi-national pharmaceutical corporations.

IT IS CLEAR THAT POPULATION CONTROL POLICIES ARE CENTRAL TO IMPERIALIST STRATEGIES AND THAT THEY ARE A CONTINUATION OF WAR IN DISGUISE TO KEEP UNDER CONTROL THE RESOURCES OF THE WORLD FOR ELITES OF THE NORTH AND THEIR COLLABORATORS IN THE SOUTH.. The claim that population is the cause of under-development or environmental degradation is a grand lie to hide the sufferings of the people caused by colonial and new colonial oppression and violence as well as to silence the resistance of the people of the world to defeat neo-colonial world (dis)order.

To camouflage their coercive and anti-women policies, population controllers coopt the language and concepts developed during the women's liberation movement. These are, e.g. "reproductive rights", "free choice", "women's needs", "empowerment of women", etc. The population controllers pretend to be the allies of women, whereas they are actually using women's bodies and their lives to further their interests and to perpetuate the inherently destructive, profit-greedy and ego-centric capitalist patriarchal growth model which we reject. As part of this strategy, the Population Control Establishments develop on even more coercive, invasive, long-acting and provider-controlled contraceptive technologies.

The growth oriented development model has led to severe environmental degradation in most parts of the world, which have, in turn, undermined peoples' security and livelihoods. We reject the prevalent notion that "overpopulation" has a causal connection with environmental degradation.

The North, with 20% of the world's people, consumes 80% of the total resources.

One of the key factors causing environmental destruction is the excessive use of energy in production and consumption. This energy is based on non-sustainable resources such as petrochemicals, coal and uranium. These resources are depletable and the extraction and production processes themselves destroy the environment. Moreover, this growth model produces an ever-increasing waste, most of which is toxic, which is often disposed in Third World Countries. The use of such forms of energy is essential to the development of high technology which perpetuates the growth oriented development. Over-consumption in the North cannot be isolated from production patterns and technological processes nor from the forces creating "consumer demands".

Women's basic needs of food, education, health, work, social and political participation and a life free of violence and oppression should be addressed on their own merit. Meeting women's needs should be de-linked from population policy including those expressed as apparent humanitarian concerns for women. Women should have access to safe contraception and legal abortion under broader health care. These needs can only be met if all life is respected and accorded dignity. We demand an end to exploitation of people and the Earth.

For all these reasons we state again that there can not be a feminist population control policy and our voices can not be used to legitimize anti-women, anti-poor and anti-nature population control policies.