

**Declaration adopted at the National Colloquium on  
Population Policy,  
Development and Human Rights**



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## Population Policy, Development and Human Rights



Nations all over the world seek the well-being of their people: their health, nutrition and education; civil and political liberties for their citizens; protection for children and provisions for the vulnerable. In this context, a sustainable human development approach is critical in placing people at the core of development. Against this backdrop, a two-day Colloquium on Population Policy, Development and Human Rights was organised by the National Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and the United Nations Population Fund in New Delhi in January 2003. The Colloquium initiated a dialogue from the perspective of development and human rights in the implementation of population policies.

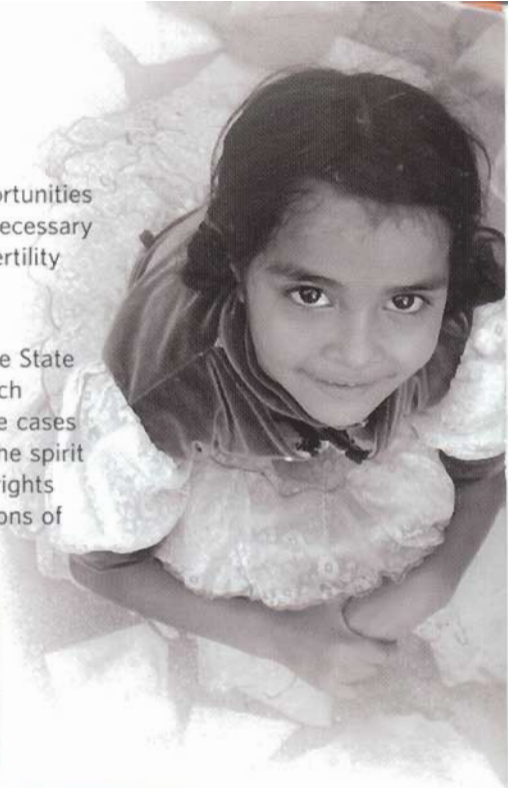
The participants of the Colloquium appreciated the efforts made by State Governments and the Union Government to frame and implement population policies, and, after having deliberated on these policies and related human rights issues, adopted the following declaration:

- Recognize the importance of having a population policy framed by the Central and State Governments to achieve population stabilization goals of the country.
- Further recognize that population policies ought to be a part of the overall sustainable development goals, which promote an enabling environment for the attainment of human rights of all concerned. Therefore, a rights-based approach is imperative in the framing of the population policies. Further, it is important that framing of such a policy and its implementation require a constant and effective dialogue among diverse stakeholders and forging of partnerships involving all levels of Government and civil society.
- Appreciate the efforts of the Government of India in framing the National Population Policy, 2000 of India which affirms the commitment of the Government to its overriding objective of economic and social development, improving the quality of lives of people through education and economic empowerment, particularly of women, providing quality health care services, thus

enhancing their well-being, and providing them with opportunities and choices to become productive assets in society, as a necessary concomitant to population stabilization and reduction in fertility rates.

Note with concern that population policies framed by some State Governments reflect in certain respects a coercive approach through use of incentives and disincentives, which in some cases are violative of human rights. This is not consistent with the spirit of the National Population Policy. The violation of human rights affects, in particular the marginalized and vulnerable sections of society, including women.

Note further that the propagation of a two-child norm and coercion or manipulation of individual fertility decisions through the use of incentives and disincentives violate the principle of voluntary informed choice and the human rights of the people, particularly the rights of the child. Similarly, the use of contraceptive targets results in undue pressure being put by service providers on clients.



Call upon the Governments of States/Union Territories to exclude discriminatory/coercive measures from the population policies that have been framed, or are proposed. States in which such measures do not form part of the policy, but are nonetheless implemented, also need to exclude these discriminatory measures.

Emphasize that in a situation where the status of women is low and son preference is prevalent, coercive measures further undermine the status of women and result in harmful practices such as female foeticide and infanticide.

Affirm that reproductive rights cannot be seen in isolation, as they are intrinsic to women's empowerment and empowerment of marginalized sections of society. Therefore, giving priority to health, education and livelihood of women is essential for exercising these rights, as also for reduction in fertility rates and stabilization of population.

- Acknowledge that reproductive rights set on the foundation of dignity and integrity of an individual encompass several aspects such as:
  - the right to informed decision-making, free from fear of discrimination;
  - the right to regular accessible, affordable, good quality and reliable health care;
  - the right to medical assistance and counselling for the choice of birth control methods appropriate for the individual couple;
  - the right to sexual and reproductive security, free from gender-based violence.
- Emphasize that capacity-building initiatives at all levels should mainstream rights-based perspective into various programmes.
- Further emphasize that for a successful implementation of any programme for population stabilization, a rights-based approach is far more effective than a coercive approach based on disincentives.
- Recognize that monitoring the human rights impact of policies and their implementation by governments is critical for ensuring that the policy processes conform to the rights framework as enshrined in the Constitution of India national laws and in international human rights instruments.
- Call upon the Central and State Governments to ensure that domestic laws on the subject promote proper exercise of reproductive rights, prevent harmful practices that derogate from a proper exercise of such rights, and protect every individual's right to a life with dignity while aiming at population stabilization and ensure allocation of adequate financial resources for the implementation of a population policy founded in human rights and development.

