

WOMEN'S VOICES '94

WOMEN'S DECLARATION ON POPULATION POLICIES

(In preparation for the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development)

PREAMBLE

Just, humane and effective development policies based on principles of social justice promote the well-being of all people. Population policies, designed and implemented under this objective, need to address a wide range of conditions that affect the reproductive health and rights of women and men. These include unequal distribution of material and social resources among individuals and groups, based on gender, age, race, religion, social class, rural-urban residence, nationality and other social criteria; changing patterns of sexual and family relationships; political and economic policies that restrict girls' and women's access to health services and methods of fertility regulation; and ideologies, laws and practices that deny women's basic human rights.

While there is considerable regional and national diversity, each of these conditions reflects not only biological differences between males and females, but also discrimination against girls and women, and power imbalances between women and men. Each of these conditions affects, and is affected by, the ability and willingness of governments to ensure health and education, to generate employment, and to protect basic human rights for all. Governments' ability and willingness are currently jeopardized by the global economic crisis, structural adjustment programs, and trends toward privatization, among other factors.

To assure the well-being of all people, and especially of women, population policies and programs must be framed within and implemented as a part of broader development strategies that will redress the unequal distribution of resources and power between and within countries, between racial and ethnic groups, and between women and men.

Population policies and programs of most countries and international agencies have been driven more by demographic goals than by quality of life goals. Population size and growth have often been blamed inappropriately as the exclusive or primary causes of problems such as global environmental degradation and poverty. Fertility control programs have prevailed as solutions when poverty and inequity are root causes that need to be addressed. Population policies and programs have typically targeted low income countries and groups, often reflecting racial and class biases.

Women's fertility has been the primary object of both pro-natalist and anti-natalist population policies. Women's behaviour rather than men's has been the focus of attention. Women have been expected to carry most of the responsibility and risks of birth control, but have been largely excluded from decision-making in personal relationships as well as in