



*“Family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other single technology now available to the human race.” (UNICEF Report 1992)*

## Population Growth and Climate Change

### Statement by the Optimum Population Trust

#### 1. Background Facts

All environmental problems, and notably those arising from climate change, would be easier to solve with a smaller future population. Population restraint in rich countries and communities would reduce the future number of major carbon emitters (who will also be victims). Restraint in poor countries and communities would reduce the number of minor emitters and likely major victims.

The gap between the extremes of the UN (2008) population projections for 2050 is 3 billion people. Current trends, with less aid for family planning, point towards the higher end - 11 bn, with no change in fertility (the UN median projection, at 9.2 bn, assumes a considerable reduction in fertility). Just meeting known, but currently unmet, need for family planning services, however, would point the projections near the lower end - 8 bn.

The recent Global Humanitarian Forum on the Human Impact of Climate Change in Geneva accepted OPT's position that population growth is a major environmental problem, making equitable mitigation and adaptation policies harder – and ultimately impossible – to solve.

#### 2. OPT recommends that climate change negotiators:

- a) recognise that population restraint is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the solution of the problems caused by climate change;
- b) accept the need for **all** countries to adopt non-coercive population policies;
- c) accept programmes to implement such policies in poorer countries as legitimate candidates for climate change funding;
- d) give immediate priority to meeting the existing unmet demand for family reproductive health care in the poorest countries;
- e) recognise that programmes educating and empowering women to control their own fertility are also essential for the success of population restraint programmes;
- f) take account of the major humanitarian benefit of lower fertility in relieving the suffering of many of the poorest women and children in the world.

### 3. OPT also recommends:

That the principle of “contraction and convergence” (rich and poor converging towards a common per person emissions target) be accepted as an equitable starting point for distributing total tolerable carbon emissions, provided that this is allocated to states on the basis of their population size at a specific date. This would encourage the adoption of population restraint policies; whereas allocation on a simple per person criterion would encourage continued population growth, thus continuously reducing every person’s carbon entitlement.

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#### Statement endorsed by

**Sir David Attenborough**, *Naturalist, broadcaster and wildlife film-maker\**

**Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta**, *Frank Ramsey professor of economics, University of Cambridge\**

**Professor Paul Ehrlich**, *Professor of population studies, Stanford University\**

**Professor John Guillebaud**, *Emeritus professor of family planning and reproductive health, University College, London\**

**Susan Hampshire**, *Actor and population campaigner\**

**James Lovelock**, *Gaia scientist and author*

**Professor Aubrey Manning**, *President of the Wildlife Trusts; emeritus professor of natural history, University of Edinburgh\**

**Professor Norman Myers**, *Visiting Fellow, Green College, Oxford University\**

**Sara Parkin**, *Founder director and trustee, Forum for the Future\**

**Jonathon Porritt**, *Founder director, Forum for the Future; former chairman, UK Sustainable Development Commission\**

**Professor Chris Rapley**, *Former director, the British Antarctic Survey*

*\*OPT patron*