



For a sustainable future

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Mr. António Guterres
Secretary-General of the United Nations
25 September 2020, via email

Dear Secretary- General,

Population Matters is a campaigning charity working to achieve a sustainable global population to protect the natural environment and improve people's lives. I am writing to you today to share a petition which has been signed by 7,700 people from 128 countries calling on the UN to address unsustainable population growth.

The signatories of this petition are urgently looking for the UN to support ethical, empowering means that will accelerate positive change. Specifically, they are calling on you to:

1. Issue a statement expressing support for smaller families, and recognising the value of ending and reversing population growth.
2. Embed positive measures to address population in the implementation and work of existing UN frameworks and bodies, such as the SDGs, IPCC and Convention on Biodiversity.
3. Explore options for the development of an international multilateral framework to address population and demographic challenges, equitably, compassionately and effectively.

As part of our campaigning work and building on this petition, we released a new report on World Population Day 2020 called: **Hitting the Targets: The Case for ethical and empowering population policies to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals**ⁱ. The report reveals how in several cases, progress towards meeting the SDGs has been, or will soon be, cancelled out entirely by population growth. Leading to greater numbers of people deprived of basic human rights and wellbeing, and with continued environmental degradation.

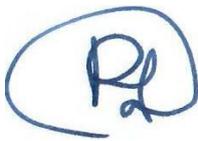
Some of the targets adversely affected include: poverty reduction, hunger, girls' education, and the number of girls facing genital mutilation (FGM). The headline figures are cause for serious concern:

- A World Bank forecast predicting that the three countries which between them have a third of the world's poor – Nigeria, India and the Democratic Republic of Congo - will not grow their economies faster than their populationⁱⁱ.
- 37 million more people were undernourished in 2017 than in 2015. Our report cautions that by the second half of the century, humankind will not be able to feed the global population without causing irreversible environmental destruction assuming current population projections prove correct.
- The number of girls out of secondary school in Sub-Sahara Africa has *increased* by 7 millionⁱⁱⁱ due to the region's population growth – in contrast, generally girls who are educated choose to have smaller families.
- Whilst the proportion of women and girls subjected to FGM is decreasing overall, the actual number of women and girls subjected to it is growing due to population growth. According to UNFPA, that number could grow from 4.1 million in 2020 to 4.6 million a year by 2030, since the cohort of girls in many high-prevalence countries is growing^{iv}.

We ask this next decade of action by the UN begins by speaking plainly about the value of ethical and empowering population policies to see progress across *all* of the SDGs.

Specifically, we are calling on policymakers to defend and invest in the ethical population policies already embedded within Goals 1, 3, 4 and 5 and to ensure they are embedded in the framework that will replace the SDGs; and finally, to include these in multilateral environmental agreements intended to achieve the SDGs.

Yours sincerely



Robin Maynard, Director

Notes:

ⁱ Hitting the Targets, Population Matters

<https://populationmatters.org/sites/default/files/Hitting%20the%20Targets%20-%20Population%20and%20the%20SDGs.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Poverty increases: In June 2020, the World Bank forecast that the three countries which between them have a third of the world's poor – Nigeria, India and the Democratic Republic of Congo - will not grow their economies faster than their populations: in the words of the Bank. UN News, 3 May 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063022>

ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF, 2020, A new era for girls <https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-new-era-for-girls-taking-stock-of-25-years-of-progress/>

^{iv} UNFPA, Against my Will - State of the World Report 2020