WORLD LEADERS DECLARATION ON POPULATION

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For a number of years now there has been increasing recognition of and concern for the world population problem. A principal barrier to population stabilization has been the sensitivity that surrounds the subject—a fact that has inhibited most world leaders from taking meaningful action. This situation was the genesis of the statement on population and the effort to enlist leaders around the world to endorse it.

With the active support of Secretary-General U Thant, the first list of twelve signatories was announced at the United Nations on Human Rights Day, 1966. On Human Rights Day, 1967, the names of eighteen additional endorsers were announced.

These thirty leaders represent many political and religious beliefs, countries large and small, highly developed and lesser-developed. Their countries are to be found in all major regions of the world and represent more than a third of the world’s population.
This is truly impressive testimony to the fact that population growth is the underlying social problem of our time and that it is losing its sensitivity. It is also a call to action. Secretary-General U Thant and these thirty heads of government have shown foresight and courage. Hopefully all leaders will heed their message.

John D. Rockefeller 3rd
Founder and Chairman of the Board
The Population Council
The peace of the world is of paramount importance to the community of nations, and our governments are devoting their best efforts to improving the prospects for peace in this and succeeding generations. But another great problem threatens the world—a problem less visible but no less immediate. That is the problem of unplanned population growth.

It took mankind all of recorded time until the middle of the last century to achieve a population of one billion. Yet it took less than a hundred years to add the second billion, and only thirty years to add the third. At today’s rate of increase, there will be four billion people by 1975 and nearly seven billion by the year 2000. This unprecedented increase presents us with a situation unique in human affairs and a problem that grows more urgent with each passing day.

The numbers themselves are striking, but their implications are of far greater significance. Too rapid population growth seriously hampers efforts to raise living standards, to further education, to improve health and sanitation, to provide better housing and transportation, to forward cultural and recreational opportunities—and even in some countries to assure sufficient food. In short, the human aspiration, common to men everywhere, to live a better life is being frustrated and jeopardized.

As heads of governments actively concerned with the population problem, we share these convictions:

_We believe_ that the population problem must be recognized as a principal element in long-range national planning if governments are to achieve their economic goals and fulfill the aspirations of their people.

_We believe_ that the great majority of parents desire to have the knowledge and the means to plan their families; that the opportunity to decide the number and spacing of children is a basic human right.

_We believe_ that lasting and meaningful peace will depend to a considerable measure upon how the challenge of population growth is met.
We believe that the objective of family planning is the enrichment of human life, not its restriction; that family planning, by assuring greater opportunity to each person, frees man to attain his individual dignity and reach his full potential.

Recognizing that family planning is in the vital interest of both the nation and the family, we, the undersigned, earnestly hope that leaders around the world will share our views and join with us in this great challenge for the well being and happiness of people everywhere.