

The Fifth General Conference Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development

**CANBERRA STATEMENT On Food Security, Population and Development September, 27th  
1996**

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Parliament House  
Canberra, Australia

## CANBERRA STATEMENT

On

### Food Security, Population and Development

1. We Parliamentarians from 29 countries of the Asia and Pacific region, home to approximately 60 per cent of the world's population and a rich cultural, traditional and religious diversity, attending the Fifth General Conference of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) in Canberra, Australia, from 25 to 27 September 1996, present the following statement on food security and population.<sup>1/</sup>

#### PREAMBLE

2. In this century, humankind has experienced an unprecedented scale of population growth. While the rate of population growth has declined due to considerable efforts, both national and international, numbers of people in absolute terms continue to increase at an alarming rate leading to large increases in food consumption and powerful pressures on the global environment, including the fragile ecosystems of island nations.

3. We must recognize that mother earth, too long taken for granted as having infinite resources, is indeed a unique and precious planet. No degree of scientific and technological progress will enable us to live beyond the limits of mother earth. We are part of a single community, destined to share a common fate, within the confines of the finite and the closed system of our planet. We cannot escape from this reality and must find ways to ensure our survival in a sustainable manner.

4. We must also recognize that food security is world security. It has a direct bearing not only on people's well-being but also on social stability, regional and world peace. Food security, therefore, is vitally important to all countries and to the international community as a whole.

5. In this century, we have overall achieved a high degree of increases in food production due to the progress of science and technology in general and to the success of the Green Revolution in particular. As a result, the rate of food production has exceeded that of the population increase. However, there are signs that this may be changing. There are going to be limitations to the availability of new cultivable land, and the shortage of fresh water resources is a serious concern which appears to be worsening every day. Furthermore, due to salt and acidic damage, over-cropping and excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, the soil has lost its integrity,

causing marginal productivity to decline. We are also being reminded that the maritime resources, which in the past seemed infinite, are indeed finite, resulting in declining harvest. The earth, which seemed to have tolerated our misbehaviour in the past, is telling us of its limits through environmental deterioration.

6. It is also important to recognize that global projections on resource availability are too often made by narrow groups of specialists. As a way of ensuring balanced and realistic projections for the future, all countries should make their own assessments of their carrying capacity. This should be done by interdisciplinary groups, including scientists from different disciplines and government officials from different specialized agencies. Parliamentarians have both special responsibilities and special capacities to bring together and listen to these divergent views.

7. While projections of global demand and supply of food and population growth give us cause for optimism in the short term, there is cause for pessimism over the long term. Before this stark reality, we must begin our efforts now to ensure that we hand over the planet in a responsible manner to the future generation. We, therefore, offer the following statement with regard to 1) population growth and food production, 2) food production and environment and 3) community development.

## **POPULATION GROWTH AND FOOD PRODUCTION**

8. Despite our commitment and efforts to reduce the rate of population increase, its numbers in absolute terms continue to increase. This implies a continued growth in the demand for food. Thus measures to limit population increase as much as possible are essential if humanity is to continue to survive on the planet. Furthermore, in order to diminish the load and to ensure sustainable food production we must develop agriculture that is in harmony with the environment.

9. As parliamentarians we stand committed to the population cause by reaffirming: the Cairo Declaration of the International Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development; the Copenhagen Statement of the International Meeting of Parliamentarians on Population and Social Development and the Tokyo Declaration of the International Meeting of Parliamentarians on Gender, Population and Development. The vision described at Cairo calls for substantial increases in resources for primary health care, family planning and reproductive health services, and primary education. This is especially critical for women and girls, and for those living in rural areas, who are often left behind in development efforts. We believe it is important for parliamentarians to

encourage the international community and their own governments to increase resources for these activities.

## **FOOD PRODUCTION AND ENVIRONMENT**

10. For more than a half a century, world food output has increased more rapidly than population growth. Social and technological developments and agricultural policies have produced significant green revolutions. These past successes are important, but they can also give a false sense of security. Even with past successes in output, there remain important distribution problems globally, nationally and within communities and households. In ensuring future increases in food output, we must keep in focus the need for environmental protection, so as to assure that agricultural development is sustainable.

11. Governments and parliamentarians should examine international agreements, including those with the World Trade Organization (WTO), and see how such agreements will affect agricultural production in their countries. Similarly, preferential trade agreements made between groups of countries may also negatively affect agricultural production and price structures. Developed countries may often make it difficult for developing countries to export their excess agricultural production. Governments would therefore do well to closely examine the impact of international agreements on agricultural exports. Before signing conventions/ agreements, the governments should see to it that the conditions imposed by such agreements do not adversely affect agriculture and the environment in the countries concerned.

12. We recognize the importance of food production which will be the focus at the World Food Summit. Equal emphasis should be placed on issues of food access and use, especially amongst the most disadvantaged communities and individual producers. The rural and urban poor must have access to sufficient food for sustainable livelihood. Rural producers of food and forest resources, especially women, must have ownership of productive assets such as land and have access to credit and appropriate technologies. Continued efforts should be made to increase food production through processes already well known, such as increased rural credit, small-scale irrigation schemes and agricultural experimentation and extension services. These are well known and well understood processes, which all too often are not sufficiently provided to small producers.

13. In the context of food production, there are many signals that current agricultural processes are environmentally destructive and thus are not sustainable. For example, the world demand for water is increasing twice as fast as population growth, and there is a host of water-related problems that need addressing, including pollution of aquifers by chemicals, soil erosion in steep lands caused by deforestation and intensive agriculture, salinisation of irrigated areas, and receding water tables, among many others. Greater effort must be made, therefore, to reduce environmental degradation,

improve ground-water management, and develop a more sustainable agriculture.

14. Environmental limitation varies by economic sector, whether it is agriculture, forestry or fisheries, or manufacturing or services. Agro-forestry-fishery industries are directly impacted by physical and environmental limitations such as availability of crop land, conditions of soil, level of water tables and climate. In this regard, unlike other industrial sectors, it is most important that a pattern of sustainable agriculture is developed taking into full consideration environmental parameters. On the other hand, properly managed agriculture and forestry production can contribute to the preservation of the environment.

15. As Parliamentarians, we acknowledge that no activity will ensure our survival if there were a collapse of the system of primary production - agro-forestry-fisheries. Many of the primary productive processes we engage in today are environmentally destructive and not sustainable. Hence, all such processes must be reviewed from the perspective of environmental preservation and sustainable development so as to build a fair and reasonable economic and trading system for each section of production.

16. We have to ensure food security at the global level by expanding regional and international co-operation, while encouraging each nation to produce food based on its environmental conditions and cultural traditions. Equally, we need to find ways to formulate more rational economic policies that will help to build a global trading system essential to preserving the finite global environment and addressing population concerns.

17. Food relief at times of natural and man-made disasters and emergencies requires regional and global co-operation. In order to build a food security system at the regional, inter-regional and global levels based on mutual co-operation, it is important to expand co-operative relations between food importing and exporting countries and to ensure that food is not used as a form of threat or any means of exploitation.

18. Another area of concern is the need to continue supporting established agricultural research, particularly adaptive and participatory research, through international and national institutions, especially in developing countries, which has produced such high economic and social returns in the past. In addition, it is necessary to promote new forms of interdisciplinary policy research for the purpose of building a tax system that provides incentives to protect the environment, taking into account the value and cost of environmental protection in economic activity.

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

19. The rural community, which has played a large role in ensuring food and water resources and preserving the environment in the process of modernization, is under stress as a result of population growth. Accompanying the stress is the population exodus from farming communities to the city, undermining public safety and causing environmental degradation of urban communities and a decrease in land for cultivation.

20. As a result of the population pressure and mobility, the capacity of the farm community to produce food, manage land and preserve the environment is being eroded. There is an urgent need for community development to curb population growth and realize food production in harmony with the environment.

21. Governments should develop appropriate legislative frameworks to provide incentives to local producers so as to enable communities to organize themselves for their own interests and benefits. Attention should be paid to such things as an independent judiciary and media to promote the empowerment of local people with particular emphasis on women. No community development can be realized without developing women's human resources and potential and integrating them fully into the development process.

22. We recognize that in many societies farmers lack economic, political and social power, and are subject to forces of the elements and decisions by remote governments. While in some developed societies farmers do exercise considerable power, often to resist fundamental changes, this is not so in developing countries. Efforts must be made to enable all farmers to exercise meaningful economic, political and social power, especially through education and training.

23. Community development also means the need to promote and ensure reproductive rights by making available reproductive health services, including family planning and sexual health, as defined in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), to all rural areas and farm communities.

24. Development of small and medium towns, with an emphasis on providing such basic amenities as safe water and electricity, assists in optimising population distribution and building viable communities. Such development may help to prevent over-concentration of population in large cities and encourage development of farm communities in harmony with the environment.

25. Population, sustainable food production, environmental protection and social development are mutually reinforcing and inter-dependent variables. Success in these areas requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach which must link specialized agencies of government and be expeditiously implemented.

26. People at risk must be involved in identifying appropriate actions to address food insecurity and malnutrition. The World Food Summit, therefore, should examine cases in which popular participation has succeeded in improving food security and population programmes. Improving women's and girls' education and enhancing their participation in all aspects of society and development will facilitate improvements in women's roles in decision making, concerning not only their reproductive health choices but also their access to and use of credit, agricultural technology and nutritional resources.

#### **COMMITMENT TO COLLECTIVE ACTION**

27. As stated in the resolutions adopted at past meetings of parliamentarians, peace, participation, co-ordination and an interdisciplinary approach are essential to solving problems of food security and population. We Parliamentarians from the Asia and Pacific region offer this statement as testimony to our firm commitment for a collective future, by reaffirming that the only way to meet these common challenges lies in working together. We therefore strongly urge the international community to honour the commitments it made at the recent major international conferences and to translate these commitments into concrete actions. We further urge the international community to make every effort to maintain a close working relationship with all agencies and organizations active in the population and development field, including the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development and its fellow parliamentarian groups.

1/ This statement takes into account the AFPPD Executive Committee Statement on Food Security and Population adopted in Kuala Lumpur on 2 May 1996 and the Statement of Parliamentarians on Food Security, Population and Development adopted at the Pacific Regional Meeting of Parliamentarians in Coral Coast, Fiji, on 14 August 1996.