

State letter hails population victory

Shortly after the Third UNCED Preparatory Committee meeting last August, the U.S. State Department sent out the following excerpted letter, congratulating itself for having orchestrated inclusion of the population issue onto the agenda of the Earth Summit.

Sept. 17, 1991

Dear Colleague:

The third meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED Preppcomm III), which was held in Geneva from August 12 to September 4 has recently concluded. I am pleased to report that population issues were well-integrated into the Agenda 21 structure and have been accepted as part of the UNCED deliberations.

Population issues form part of four final decision documents:

1. Earth Charter/Rio de Janeiro Declaration (Statement of Principles)
2. Structure of Agenda 21, (which will require the integration of population concerns into all Agenda 21 documents).
3. Specific Agenda 21 recommendations for addressing the relationship of poverty, demographic pressures, health and the environment. . . .
4. Human Settlements (calls for harmonizing human-settlement policies with population and urbanization policies).

The sessions on population, environmental education and health ended with a clear acknowledgement by all participating nations of the linkage of population growth and distribution, and development and environmental degradation.

The draft text in the decision document which covers poverty, education and health issues, includes a statement that "population pressure and distribution can have immense impact on the prospects for conservation and sustainable development. Options for action in the field of population should strive to build national capacities and provide support for each country in measures which enable it to achieve a sustainable balance between its population, its environment and resource endowments and the standard of living to which its people aspire."

In support of the stabilization of population growth, one participating nation mentioned that "in order to ensure global sustainable development, it is paramount that countries for-

ulate national policies that will lead to reduced rates of population growth until its stabilization within a given time horizon." For your information I have enclosed copies of the relevant documents for your perusal. . . .

Although much remains to be done in the negotiating sessions of Preppcomm IV . . . we made progress in meeting our collective goals for the framework of the conference. . . .

Sincerely,
Nancy O'Neal Carter,
Coordinator for Population Affairs

Documents

Ms. Carter accompanied her letter with the key documents relating to population that had been agreed upon at Preppcomm III. We excerpt the relevant portions here.

From "Human Settlements" (A/CONF.151/PC/L.):

"The Preparatory Committee . . . requests that certain program area targets should be more clearly defined, for example . . . (iv) By harmonizing human settlements policies with population and urbanization policies. . . ."

From "Poverty, education, health—Coordinator's draft text" (A/CONF.151/PC/CRP.14):

"6. Population pressure and distribution can have immense impact on prospects for conservation and sustainable development. Options for action in the field of population should strive to build national capacities and provide support for each country in measures which enable it to achieve a sustainable balance between its population, its environment and resource endowments and the standard of living to which its people aspire. . . .

10. Programs and activities developed in Agenda 21 should be consistent with priorities listed above and address the following areas:

- (e) Reduction of demographic pressures. . . ."

From "Poverty, sustainability and demographic pressures, health and education" (A/CONF.151/PC/L.51):

"The Preparatory Committee of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development . . . decides . . . to request the Secretary General of the Conference to integrate fully development considerations and needs and realities, in particular of the developing countries, in all Agenda 21 program documents, taking into account the close relationship between development and the environment. In accordance with its decision 1/25, this should include. . .

(b) Demographic pressures and unsustainable consumption patterns and environment."