THE WORK OF THE POPULATION INSTITUTE

With family planning facing yet another crossroads, the Population Institute (PI) strives to be a catalyst for change in everything we do. Doing so requires us to be innovative and flexible. We know from 43 years of experience that it’s possible to leverage significant change with relatively small investments of time and resources, but we also understand the vital importance of persistence and hard work. With our limited resources, we seek to maximize our impact by doing things that no other organization is doing, or doing them with greater impact.
A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND CEO:

It’s evident that the international debate about family planning and reproductive health is at a crossroads. The decisions that are made at the national and international levels in the next few years will likely determine whether the goal of universal access to family planning and reproductive healthcare is eventually made a reality, or effectively abandoned. With the largest ever generation of young people entering, or about to enter, their prime reproductive years, the stakes are high.

While some countries, such as Ethiopia and Rwanda, are making great strides in empowering women and breaking down the cultural and other barriers that prevent women in the developing world from exercising their reproductive rights, many others have not. Severely impoverished countries, like Niger and Burkina Faso, are still struggling to lower their birth rates and escape from the vicious cycle of large families, poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition. In my travels to South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, I have seen plenty of reasons for optimism, but unless the United States and other donor nations boost their support—and address obstacles like child marriage—many countries may never realize their potential.

I am very troubled by what’s happening here in the United States. How is it that the U.S. House of Representatives voted last year to abolish the Title X program, which gives low-income women in this country access to contraceptives and screenings for breast and cervical cancer? What were members of the U.S. House of Representatives thinking when they voted to slash international family planning assistance by 25 percent? In a world afflicted by climate change, food insecurity, and the rapid extinction of plant and animal species, why are we debating contraception? Does anyone seriously believe that the world will be a better place if there are more unplanned pregnancies?

What I have learned in the past year is that we can take nothing for granted. In 2011, as in prior years, PI has educated lawmakers, opinion leaders, and the general public about the challenges posed by rapid population growth and the benefits of expanding family planning services and information both at home and abroad. That work is as important as ever.

Looking back on 2011, I want to thank all of our advisors, activists and contributors for their continuing support of our work. With your backing, PI is continuing to make a difference both here and abroad. Much remains to be done, and the need for action grows more urgent, but the world is becoming more aware of the benefits that flow from educating and empowering women, and expanding family planning services and information worldwide.

Thank you for your dedication to the cause, to our work, and to creating a better world.

Sincerely,

William N. Ryerson
Chair and CEO
While many members of Congress are unalterably opposed to family planning, we operate under the assumption that some members just need to be better informed. Many simply do not understand the crucial role that family planning plays in fighting poverty, eliminating hunger, boosting educational attainment, enhancing food security, mitigating environment harm, and reducing infant and maternal mortality. That’s why we produce fact sheets and reports that give members of Congress a better appreciation for what’s at stake.

In 2011, we produced and distributed two landmark reports about population and international family planning. The first of these was a report that was released in September in connection with world population reaching the 7 billion mark. Titled, “From 6 Billion to 7 Billion: How population growth is changing and challenging our world,” it gave Congress and the media an overview of how rapid population growth is hindering efforts aimed at eradicating hunger and severe poverty. The report also highlighted how rapid population growth and rising levels of consumption are contributing to the deterioration of the environment and imperiling humanity’s future.

The second report, which was completed in October, examined the status of U.S. support for family planning programs in Latin America. Titled, “USAID Graduation from Family Planning Assistance: Implications for Latin America,” it looked at how efforts to phase out family planning assistance in the region could negatively affect the progress that has been made in increasing contraceptive usage and lowering fertility rates. The report, which was written by Dr. Jane Bertrand of Tulane University, highlighted the continuing need for family planning assistance in Bolivia, Haiti, Guatemala and Peru, while also raising possible concerns about plans to phase out assistance in Honduras and Nicaragua.
For nearly four decades now, PI has been educating parliamentarians overseas about population growth and the benefits of family planning. Last year PI conducted briefings for parliamentarians at meetings and conferences in France, India and South Africa.

Our work with European parliamentarians continues to focus on the urgent need for European nations to reverse a 15-year slide in their support for international family planning. Thankfully those efforts are beginning to pay off. In the past few years a number of European countries have pledged to boost their support, and hopes are high that the turnaround will continue in 2012.

In our meetings with parliamentarians from developing countries, we have stressed the crucial linkage between family planning and efforts to eradicate hunger, diminish severe poverty, boost educational attainment, and improve health outcomes for women and their families. With support from the international donor community still lagging, it’s imperative that governments in the developing world commit more of their own resources to family planning and reproductive health programs.
Our communications work this past year focused on using the 7 billion population milestone as a “teachable moment.” As a result of those efforts, we were able to expand the universe of reporters and producers that are interested in the subject of population and family planning. Our landmark report, “From 6 Billion to 7 Billion: How population growth is changing and challenging our world,” received extensive media coverage, including mention in the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. In conjunction with the report and the 7 billion population milestone, PI participated in more a dozen radio programs, including Voice of America, widely syndicated radio talk shows, and state affiliates of National Public Radio (NPR). PI also wrote numerous columns and opinion pieces that were picked up by major newspapers and online publications.

Every year, PI recognizes print, radio, and television media for excellence in reporting on issues related to population. Our 32nd annual Global Media Awards competition recognized an Ethiopian serial drama, a Kenyan newspaper, a Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist, the PBS News Hour, the United Nations Population Fund, and films produced by Tiroir A Films and Population Action International. The awards were presented at a reception and dinner held in New York City on January 12, 2012. Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney spoke at the reception. Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, the new Executive Director of the United Nations Population, gave the keynote address at the awards dinner.
Last year, the Chairman of the UN’s Commission on Population and Development (CPD) asked PI to brief UN missions and delegations on the challenges of meeting the reproductive health needs of adolescent populations in developing countries. PI also worked with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) last year to bring family planning and reproductive health into the global debate over environmental sustainability. In preparation for the “Rio+20” Earth Summit (UN Conference on Sustainable Development) in June of 2012, PI worked with UNFPA on a pre-summit briefing for delegates and their staffs. PI also developed a user-friendly, web-based application that allows users—including Rio+20 delegates—to look at how population, consumption patterns, and other factors affect a country’s sustainability. Finally, PI worked directly with various country-level delegations to the Rio+20 Earth Summit to advocate for language that would commit countries to improving their environmental governance and incorporating “resource sufficiency evaluation” practices into their national strategic planning processes.
One of the greatest failures of family planning and reproductive health advocates in this country has been our inability to capture the imagination and enthusiasm of young people, including college and university students. While they tend to be supportive of reproductive health and rights, young people often fail to see the relevance of family planning to many of the issues that they care passionately about, including environment, gender equality, and social justice. In the past year, our petition campaigns—which have focused on the importance of achieving universal access to contraceptives and reproductive health care—have been well received by younger audiences. Altogether, we collected more than 25,000 signatures.

Every year we sponsor, with the support of allied organizations, a Global Population Speak Out (GPSO) that enlists the participation of hundreds of scientists, researchers and other experts in our efforts to raise the public awareness of population and the benefits that flow from expanding family planning services and information to women who want to avoid a pregnancy. This past year, we hosted a special GPSO in October to coincide with world population reaching the 7 billion mark on October 31. The participants undertook a wide range of activities, including opinion pieces, blogs, letters to the editor, classroom lectures, campus events, and participation in radio and television shows.
Three years ago, PI launched a Sustainable World Initiative (SWI) for purposes of educating the media and the public about issues relating to population and sustainability, including the food crisis, water shortages, depletion of scarce resources, loss of biodiversity, and climate change. In 2011, SWI joined with the Environic Foundation International in developing educational tools that can be used in college and university classrooms to educate students about population and sustainability. SWI also developed, with funding from the United Nations, an interactive web-based program that will allow Internet users to examine the environmental sustainability of more than 150 countries.

In preparation for the Rio+20 Earth Summit, SWI has been working closely with selected country-level delegations to build support for monitoring and evaluating sustainability at the national and international levels. In connection with that work SWI has been advocating for the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals—similar in design to the Millennium Development Goals—that would encourage every country to use recognized metrics (e.g. the Ecological Footprint) to determine what levels of population and consumption are sustainable in the long run.
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