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## **U.N. Population Fund Report: Improving Women's Welfare Key For Humanity's Future**

*by John Neagle*

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According to a report by the United Nations Population Fund released in mid-May, investment in welfare improvements for women is the key to humanity's future. The most vulnerable dimensions of the world system, said the report are 1) demographic growth and population distribution; and 2) environmental deterioration. Both factors, according to the report, could be remedied by means of investment destined to improve women's lot in life in the areas of health and family planning, and in socio-economic and political opportunity. The latter could be summarized by providing women with equal access to land, credit and remunerative employment, alongside de facto recognition of personal and political rights. The report states that the degree of freedom women can exercise in making decisions which affect their lives is crucial not only in poor nations, but also in so-called developed countries. The report continues by asserting that the world population crisis demands immediate action. Today, the global population numbers 5.2 billion, and is estimated to increase at an average 90 million per year until 2000. If family planning programs recommended by the UN are implemented, world population in 2025 will be 8.5 billion. If such programs are ignored, world population in that year may reach 10 billion. According to the UN, an estimated 45% of all women in child-bearing years use contraceptives. Only 14% of African women use contraceptives; in Asia, 50%; and Latin America, 56%. In another section of the report, the UN agency estimates that 75% of Latin American women who use no method of family planning wish to delay or limit pregnancies. The same proportion in Asia is 43%, and in Africa, 27%. Consequently, said the report, it is evident that the availability of contraceptives for women who wish to use them is wholly insufficient. Selected recommendations for governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations are summarized below: \* Family planning becomes a development priority, equivalent in importance to economic investment of all kinds. At least 1% of GDP should be dedicated to family planning. \* Revision of legal systems with the aim of removing barriers that obstruct or prevent women's full participation in the society at large and in the family, and toward guaranteeing equality of women and men before the law. \* Emphasize at all levels of schooling the principle that women are the equals of men in all ways, i.e., that their value in no way is less than that of men. \* Promote women's access to decision-making positions in government and the private sector to guarantee their input in the development and implementation of programs affecting women. \* Collaboration with UNESCO (UN Education, Science and Culture Organization) to improve and expand education at all levels for women, and to promote literacy programs with the aim of reaching at least 70% of all women world-wide. Finally, the report recommended that international assistance to family planning programs be increased from the current \$500 million to \$2.5 billion. (Basic data from Notimex, 05/16/89)

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