Science academies call for action on population

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The world is in the midst of an unprecedented expansion of human numbers. It took hundreds of thousands of years for our species to reach a population level of 10 million, only 10,000 years ago. This number grew to 100 million about 2000 years ago and to 2,500 million by 1950. Within less than the span of a single lifetime, it has more than doubled to 5,500 million in 1993.

In view of this alarming situation, an urgent call was made by the representatives of the national academies of science throughout the world at an unprecedented "Science Summit" on World Population in New Delhi, India, on 24-27 October 1993. The participants, in a joint statement, asked for immediate action by governments and decision-makers to adopt an integrated policy on population and sustainable development on a global scale. They hoped that the Statement would reach the attention of governments and peoples of all countries and contribute to further discourse and appropriate policy decisions on these complex but critically important matters, and provide scientific input into preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development.

The Statement declared: “Humanity is approaching a crisis point with respect to the interlocking issues of population, environment, and development. Scientists today have the opportunity and responsibility to mount a concerted effort to confront our human predicament. But science and technology can only provide tools and blueprints for action and social change. It is the governments and international decision-makers, including those meeting in Cairo in September 1994 at the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development, who hold the key to our future.

“We urge them to take incisive action now and to adopt an integrated policy on population and sustainable development on a global scale. With each year's delay the problems become more acute. Let 1994 be remembered as the year when the people of the world decided to act together for the benefit of future generations.”

Signed by representatives of 58 academies, the Statement reflects continued concern about the intertwined problems of rapid population growth, wasteful resource consumption, environmental degradation and poverty. The academies believe that ultimate success in dealing with global social, economic and environmental problems cannot be achieved without a stable world population. The Statement underscored the goal of reaching zero population growth within the lifetime of our children.

One of the main conclusions reached was that sustainability of the natural world is everyone’s responsibility, including individuals, communities, private institutions, governments, nongovernmental organizations and the international community.

Among the major recommendations are:
- equal opportunities for women and men in sexual, social and economic life so they can make individual choices about family size;
- universal access to convenient family planning and health services, and a wide variety of safe and affordable contraceptive options;
- encouragement of voluntary approaches to family planning and elimination of unsafe and coercive practices.

The Statement ended by declaring: “Action is needed Now.”

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