



Téléfax: (41-22) 917 90 10  
Télégrammes: UNATIONS, GENEVE  
Téléx: 41 29 62  
Téléphone: (41-22) 917.91.79  
Internet www.unhchr.ch  
E-mail: jheenan@ohchr.org



Address:  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 GENEVE 10

REFERENCE:

27 March 2006

Dear Messrs McCafferty and Ottaway

I am responding to your invitation to submit written evidence to the Parliamentary Hearings on "Population Growth – Impact on the Millennium Development Goals".

While OHCHR is not at present in a position to provide a detailed written submission on the issues outlined in your letter, I would like to take this opportunity to underline what are, in my view, some key human rights concerns relating to population growth and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

#### Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Population growth is inherently linked to individuals' sexual and reproductive health and rights. The MDGs bear on these issues, particularly the Goals relating to the empowerment of women, maternal health, child health and HIV/AIDS. Sexual and reproductive rights focus on not only the physical health of women, but also on issues related to their status in society and general wellbeing, including the freedom to decide whether or not to have children.

The right to have access to a full range of relevant information – which is central to a number of civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights – plays a crucial role in ensuring enjoyment of all sexual and reproductive rights. In the context of population growth and efforts to achieve the MDGs, emphasis must be placed on ensuring access to information on reproductive issues and on health, particularly for girls and women. Empirical evidence exists to show that ensuring access to information and education for women and girls results in improved human rights outcomes for themselves and their children, including in the area of health.

/...

Chris McMafferty MP and Richard Ottaway MP  
All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population  
Development and Reproductive Health  
Room 563 Portcullis House  
Westminster  
London SW1A 2 LW  
UK

In the context of HIV and AIDS and population growth, I would submit that the role of education and information campaigns is crucial for an effective response, as is combating discrimination against women. For a more detailed examination of these issues, I refer the Parliamentary Group to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of health (E/CN.4/2004/49) dated 16 February 2004. Section I of the report is devoted to the rights to sexual and reproductive health. A copy is enclosed.

### Migration

The human rights dimensions of migration, and their impact on development issues, is a current concern of myself and my Office. We can say that generally migration has a positive effect on development outcomes in receiving, transit and sending countries, as well as for migrants themselves. These benefits, however, will only be fully realized where the human rights of migrants - both regular and irregular - and their families are respected and protected. Human rights thus play an instrumental role in ensuring that migration has a positive impact, in addition to a normative role in setting out state obligations with regard to the treatment of migrants.


### MDGs generally

The relevance of human rights to strategies to achieve the MDGs needs to be constantly emphasized. Human rights and the Goals share similar motivations and are complementary in their approaches. While achievement of the MDGs will greatly advance the realization of human rights for much of the world's population, it is only in ensuring respect for human rights that the Goals can be achieved in a sustainable way. Specific human rights in the international human rights treaties relate to each of the Goals, such as the right to health mentioned earlier. In addition, a rights-based approach to the Goals more generally requires: (a) respect for the principle of non-discrimination; (b) ensuring meaningful participation of those whom the Goals intend to benefit; (c) being specific about accountability for both human rights obligations and development commitments (including on the part of donors); and (d) establishing adequate monitoring mechanisms to support this accountability. I am enclosing for the Parliamentary Group's information a paper on human rights and the MDGs prepared by my Special Advisor on Human Rights and the MDGs, Professor Philip Alston of New York University.

These are a few of the human rights issues relevant when looking at the impact of population growth on the achievement of the MDGs.

Thank you for your invitation to contribute and I wish the Parliamentary Group successful hearings.

Yours sincerely,



Louise Arbour  
High Commissioner for Human Rights