Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1243 (1994)[1]

Demographic change and sustainable development

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly emphasises that demographic change is a global phenomenon characterised by interdependence and that population trends, social policies, environmental change and the patterns of production, consumption and international trade are closely interlinked.

2. The present situation is that despite a slackening world population growth rate, the absolute figure will continue to increase over the next three decades to a level of between 7 and 12 thousand million inhabitants. Developing countries will account for over 95% of the increase.

3. In these countries the social status and level of education and training of women can play a fundamental role in reducing demographic growth, poverty and the degradation of natural resources.

4. Meanwhile, we are confronted with a steady deterioration of our environment. Nevertheless, the population factor, although significant, is only partly responsible because other factors, notably patterns of production and consumption and lifestyles, are also at work.

5. The Assembly points out, for example, that in per capita terms air pollution caused by the inhabitants of industrialised countries is five times greater than in developing countries. Grave ecological problems are therefore predictable as developing countries realise their legitimate aspiration to a standard of living on a par with industrialised countries.

6. In this context, the Assembly reiterates the principle of common but differentiated responsibility acknowledged at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, June 1992), which pledges countries of rapid demographic expansion to reduce the growth rate and industrialised countries to reduce the negative impact of their industrial activities and to use their resources in a rational manner.

7. The Assembly affirms that demographic policy must in all cases be founded on freedom of choice as regards reproduction given that the choice of responsible procreation is an inalienable right of all couples. This freedom, based on the values of life and the family, can only be exercised under social and political conditions ensuring respect for human dignity, equality between the sexes and participatory pluralist democracy. This calls for adequate measures in such fields as information, education and health.

8. The Assembly also emphasises the need to reconcile individual aspirations with the contemporary forms of social organisation characteristic of European societies so as to ensure the greatest possible harmony between societal imperatives and personal wishes. Likewise, having regard to the ageing of Europe's population, every effort must be made to establish equitable inter-generational relations.

9. The Assembly accordingly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

9.1. organise a thematic campaign centred on the situation of women in Europe and worldwide, as a major step in preparations for the 4th United Nations Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in September 1995;

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1. Assembly debate on 28 June 1994 (18th Sitting) (see Doc. 7089, report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, Rapporteur: Mrs Robert). Text adopted by the Assembly on 28 June 1994 (18th Sitting).

9.2. build up the resources of the North-South Centre in Lisbon so that it is better able to impress on public opinion the universality and interdependence of demographic issues, and in particular, the need for the industrialised countries to cut back or eliminate patterns of consumption and production which are incompatible with sustainable development;

9.3. invite member states:

a. to take account of demographic trends and changes in the state of resources when framing their social and economic policies and development assistance programmes;

b. to step up their co-operation on matters of population and sustainable development in the Council of Europe framework, and notably in the European Population Committee (CDPO), with a view to obtaining the broadest possible understanding of essential factors such as the carrying capacities of ecosystems, access to resources, demographic trends and technological development;

c. to increase the proportion of their development aid devoted to improving the level of education and health, including the expansion of demographic education services, as well as the legal and social status of women in order to give couples (men and women) the necessary means to reach a responsible decision on the number of their children;

d. to take steps as quickly as possible to implement the recommendations of the Rio Declaration on environment and development;

e. to favour cleaner technologies conducive to sustainable development for the world and for future generations.