

WOMEN'S DECLARATIONS  
on Reproductive Technologies and  
*Genetic Engineering*

UBINIG &  
NARIGRANTHA PRABARTANA

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Genetic Engineering



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# THE POLITICS OF WOMEN RESISTING TECHNOLOGY: A NOTE FROM PUBLISHER

Reproductive technologies and genetic engineering are no more unknowns; they constitute a major contested site of power, greed and ideology. The corporate practice of science and technology by its very nature is against women. Technologies are not produced in a social vacuum, they are the products of competition between greedy companies and reflect new social and technological hierarchies. Manifestly they are commodities intended to make profit. As technology they also carry the deep interventionist urge, the masculine project of conquering passive, imperfect and lowly state of evolution -- the nature -- the women. No wonder why in the present imperial global order of war and terror one could hardly separate Technology from Capital.

Women have been the main targets of the reproductive technologies; the womb of women has become new sector of corporate capitalist production and intervention. Fertility of women in the third world countries has been seen as a problem and political threat to the developed nations; therefore population control programmes were implemented

with contraceptive technologies. These technologies included pills, condom, IUDs, injectables, implants and sterilisation. These coercive and externally driven policies coincided with the movements for birth control and for reproductive freedom in Europe, America and among the elite women in the developing countries. Ideological justification to terminate the colored population and the disposable poor was not difficult. But it is amazing to see how modern racism could speak in so many languages and so varied discourses such as overpopulation, family planning, reproductive health, carrying capacity of the earth, ecology and environment -- and of course not to mention about the 'reproductive "right" of women. It is important to note that safety of a contraceptive technology was never the criteria of selection and approval in a population terminating program, the dominating paradigm was "acceptability of the clients". An army of surveyors, researchers, consultants and NGOs grew to realize new eugenic discourses.

While the fertility control technologies were promoted in the third world, the medical industry found great profit in fertility inducing technologies. They are pro-fertility or assisting reproduction and pre-natal diagnosis such as sex determination and sex pre-selection and for genetic purposes including detection of birth defects, disabilities etc. These were also called New Reproductive Technologies (NRTs) which offered not only hopes(?) for having children by

women with infertility but also to have “perfect babies”.

Women’s health movements in the developed and developing countries have raised questions against new reproductive technologies and resisted the imposition and commercialisation of them as a part of their anti-eugenic, anti-racists, anti-imperialist and anti-patriarchal movement. However, a section of women have helped the same forces by raising demands such as “reproductive rights” and “choice” without really questioning the context in which the technologies are developed and promoted. Most importantly, they refused to encounter the ideology of technology in the present global order of war and terror, the way technologies serve to justify corporate greed, racism and patriarchy.

The women's movement resisting technology must be seen in these concrete political contexts. One can not discuss technology in abstract without being a part of the global establishment of war and terror.

Now a days, the reproductive technologies both in the form of anti-fertility technologies, pro-fertility technologies and genetic engineering are everywhere. Many new technologies are also developed and still in research stage, but are being implemented as programmes. Test tube babies are born in countries like Bangladesh. Sex selection technologies are rampant and causing violence against women.

This booklet is a document, which is presenting two

important declarations, which came out of two conferences held in Comilla, Bangladesh in 1989 and 1993. These declarations are the milestones of women's movement. The FINRRAGE-UBINIG International Conference, 1989 made 38 points in the declaration, which covered almost all the issues that are being expressed as concerns in these days. The Declaration of the People's Perspectives on "Population" Symposium came out in 1993, which was very important document before the International Conference on Population and Development, (ICPD), 1994 and the points are still very relevant.

In the World Social Forum, these two documents are shared to develop a common and critical position on the reproductive technologies and genetic engineering.

Farida Akhter

UBINIG/Narigrantha Prabartana

Dhaka, Bangladesh

3 January, 2004

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# THE DECLARATION OF COMILLA

Finrrage - UBINIG  
International Conference 1989

19 - 25 March, 1989  
Venue: BARD, Kotbari, Comilla, Bangladesh

Organised by  
FINRRAGE and UBINIG



## INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFERENCE

The FINRRAGE - UBINIG International Conference held in March 1989 was a historic occasion. It was held in the peaceful atmosphere of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, BARD located in Comilla - a small town nearly 97 km away from the capital city of Dhaka. About 149 participants from 34 countries were present. After having discussion for over a week, the final outcome was the DECLARATION OF COMILLA - a collective document of women on the reproductive technologies and genetic engineering.

The conference was unique and historic for a number of reasons:

Firstly, in the history of FINRRAGE international conference, this was the first conference to be held in a country of the south like Bangladesh. As the conference was focussing on the issues of population control, reproductive technologies and genetic engineering affecting women both in the developed and in the developing



countries, the location of the conference to be in a developing country was very significant. FINRRAGE could take a real international character with the presence of women from all over the world, mostly from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Prior to this, the Participants from developing countries have been attending the conferences held in the developed nations. The theme, tone and trend of discussions were usually around the realities of developed nations. When women from the developing nations spoke about the situation of poverty and other forms of economic and social oppression faced by them the intensity of her experience got lost in that environment. It was always very difficult for the western participants to grasp the gravity of the problems faced by women in these regions if they do not see the real situations. The western friends have always been sympathetic to the problems faced by the women in the developing countries, but yet a gap always remained in their perception. The Comilla conference was a bridge to this gap.

Secondly, not only that there was a gap between the women from the developed and the developing countries, there was also very little coordination among the women within the developing countries. Although they were living in similar

economic, social and political situations yet there were fewer exchanges and sharing of the problems among themselves. There are not much scope for exchange of ideas and information within feminist organisations or individuals of the developing countries on very critical issues affecting women. The decision to hold the conference in Bangladesh was taken after consideration of the above facts as well. Therefore, special efforts were made to bring women from Asia, Africa and Latin American countries. Although we had fewer women from Africa and Latin America, the participation from Asia and Pacific was quite good in number.

Thirdly, this conference marked the beginning of critical discussion on the reproductive technologies and genetic engineering among women crossing the boundaries of different nationalities and geographical borders at a time when many people did not know of the developments of many technologies and their potential impact on women.

FINRRAGE as a global network of women has always contemplated to understand the common origin of different technologies aimed at women. Even in their contradictory appearance in the developed and underdeveloped countries as pro-fertility and anti-fertility devices or methods the contraceptive and reproductive technologies should not be seen as remotely unconnected. Both are

aimed at the uterus and its reproductive power. This common target has brought the women of the developed and the underdeveloped countries to a single platform to discuss the issues related to their bodies and their lives.

The rise of the modern contraceptive technologies is very much linked with the theories of population "explosion" bringing the era of population control. The reduction of the number of population of the third world, especially of the poor and the powerless, is the explicit objective of the population control agencies. As a consequence third world women are being subjected to the co-ercion of their respective state agencies. The population control policies target the women of the third world quite directly. They are often the receiving end of unsafe and harmful contraceptive methods. Multinational companies, as the producer of contraceptives, have wielded profitable alliance with the population planners around the world and have been successfully exploiting every opportunity to dump their products upon the population of the third world countries. The conference was an opportunity for many third world women to share their experiences in this light.

In the developed countries, on the other land, women are increasingly becoming the victims of

various reproductive technologies and practices of biogenetic engineering. These include abuses of women by such new technologies as in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer, flushing, sex predetermination, prenatal diagnosis and the so-called "surrogate motherhood." The new reproductive technologies, as they are called, are offered to infertile women. But these technologies are not confined to the use in the infertile. The coercive nature of these technologies has already been exposed and criticised by women in many countries. Women are organizing to resist these technologies.

The Comilla Declaration is therefore a very important document for women all over the world as it has grasped the issues of contraceptive technologies, the so-called new reproductive technologies and genetic engineering, the experimentation on women etc. With the common perspective of women from the developed and the developing countries.

# THE DECLARATION OF COMILLA, 1989

1

We, women from Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Fiji, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Hong Kong, Holland, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Phillipines, Sri Lanka, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, U.K, Uganda, U.S.A and Zambia, have meet in Comilla, Bangladesh, to share our concern about reproductive and genetic engineering and women's reproductive health. We feel an urgent need to half the political decision which are leading to the rapid development and increasing application of these technologies.

2

Initial experiences with reproductive and genetic engineering all over the world show that these technologies are aggravating the deteriorating position of women in society and intensifying the existing differences among people in terms of race, class, caste, sex, and religion. These technologies also contribute to the further

destabilizing of the already critical situation

3

Genetic and reproductive engineering are part of an ideology of eugenics which we oppose. In this ideology, human beings are viewed as inherently inferior or superior. This leads to degradation, discrimination and elimination of oppressed groups; be they women, disabled, people of certain colors, races religions, class, or caste. Similarly, traits of animals and plants are arbitrarily valued as being desirable or undesirable and become subject to genetic manipulation. Eugenics justifies the political strategy used by those in power to divide and rule.

4

Women from the participating countries described how eugenic ideology and racism are the basis of population control policies. We resist population control policies and methods. They hide the true roots of poverty as exploitation by the rich. They reduce women to their reproduction organs. We object to women being used as experimental subjects by science, industry and government.

5

Genetic and reproductive engineering, as well as population control, are introduced and promoted on the grounds that they solve problems such as hunger, disease and pollution. In reality, however, they divert attention from the real cause and are incapable of solving these problems. Nor do they reflect women's demands and needs.

6

Genetic and reproductive engineering claim to offer unlimited control over all live forms, but tinkering with genetic codes opens up a truly uncontrollable situation of 'runaway designer genes' and unintended consequences. These changes will be particularly hazardous because a chain reaction will be set in motion which cannot be traced back its origins. The effects produced cannot be countered. They will be irreversible.

7

In our increasingly materialistic and consumer oriented world, genetic engineering is promising unlimited diversity. But to live in a man-made patriarchal world where everything has been

8

tampered with will be to live with the ultimate limitation. Our present finite world of resources offers a richer diversity than that promised by genetic engineering with its selective, eugenic, and patriarchal philosophy.

## 8

Genetic and reproductive engineering are a product of the development of science which started off by viewing the whole world as a machine. Just as a machine can be broken down into it's components, analysed and put back, living beings are seen as consisting of components which can be viewed in isolation. Aspects of nature which cannot be measured or quantified are seen as subjective and of no value and are therefore neglected. In there ignorance or disregard of the complex interrelationships in life, scientists collaborate with industry and big capital and believe they have finally acquired the power to create and reconstruct plants, animals, other forms of life and, possibly soon, even human beings.

## 9

We oppose this patriarchal, industrial, commercial and racist domination over life.



## 10

In our work of bearing and raising children, caring for the sick or disabled, growing, preserving food, materials for clothes and other basic human needs, we women have developed and passed on for generations a wealth of Knowledge and skills about dealing with all of nature in a compassionate, humane, and ecologically sustainable way. We realize that this Knowledge and these skills, as well as the contributions of women to the arts, crafts, culture and social relations are generally not recognized as having value in mainstream science, philosophy, or technology. But these have been, and still are, vital for the survival of human beings and all of nature. They are valuable human achievements and resources. We want to renew, reaffirm and build upon this female tradition.

## 11

We strongly believe that reproductive and genetic engineering cannot meet the needs of women or enhance their status in today's societies. We therefore demand the participation and recognition of women in all spheres of life. We want women to have access to resources, income, employment, social security and a safe environment

at work and at home. Quite fundamentally, we demand living and working conditions that assure a life of human dignity for all women worldwide.

## 12

We demand access for girls to practical knowledge, resources, and skills that are in women's best interest and further women's well being. These include an education about taking care of primary health needs including nutrition. This will empower women and increase women's general health, reduce morbidity and mortality of women and children. Such primary care will reduce the number of children born with mental and physical disabilities and also reduce infertility.

## 13

We demand Knowledge and access to safe contraception which does not harm women's bodies. We reject any coercion, be it through force, incentives or disincentives, in the name of population control policies, such as enforced sterilisation particularly in camps and in target-oriented policies, We demand a stop to the use of dangerous IUDs, unsafe injectables, hormonal implants, such as Norplant, and other hormonal contraceptives as well as anti-fertility vaccines.

14

We support the recovery by women of knowledge, skill and power that gives childbirth, fertility and all women's health care back into the hands of women. We demand recognition, support and facilitation of the work of midwives and reestablishment of midwifery services under the control of women.

15

We demand literature be distributed and education be given about the adverse effects of all contraceptive methods.

16

We demand contraceptives for men be developed and that men also be made responsible for contraception.

17

We demand the United Nations and the governments of the respective countries stop population control policies as preconditions for developmental aid.

## 18

We support the exclusive rights of all women to decide whether or not to bear children without coercion from any man, medical practitioner, government or religion. We demand that women shall not be criminalized for choosing and performing abortion.

## 19

We oppose the medicalization and commercialization of the desire of women for motherhood.

## 20

Internationally, we demand that conditions be created under which social parenthood in a variety of forms meets the needs of children and people who wish to care for children. In particular maternity and child care should be a social concern rather than the responsibility of individual women.

## 21

We condemn men and their institutions that inflict infertility on women by violence, forced sterilization, medical maltreatment and industrial

pollution, and repeat the damage through violent 'repair' technologies.

22

Given the continuing deterioration of women's lives through the application of patriarchal science and technology, we call for an international public trial on medical crimes against women to be organized by women.

23

We demand research into the prevention of infertility as well as an end to the stigmatization of the infertile. Infertility needs to be acknowledged a social condition and not as a disease.

24

We protest the use of in vitro fertilization in countries that wish to increase or decrease births. It is a dangerous dehumanizing technology. It uses women as living test sites and producers of eggs and embryos as raw material to enable scientists to work towards further control over the production and quality control of human beings and international business to accumulate profit. Furthermore, it is a failed technology which also

takes away resources from basic reproductive health needs.

25

The social discrimination against women is aggravated through the technologies of sex determination and sex preselection resulting in a growing adverse sex ratio in some countries. We demand a ban on such applications of these technologies.

26

We are against any kind of bias and discrimination against disabled people including that of genetic screening and counselling. We particularly oppose the human genome project within this context. Prenatal diagnosis, genetic screening and genetic counselling do not offer the solution for disability. Instead we demand the elimination of hazardous drugs, radiation, hazardous chemicals at the workplace and in the environment and a solution to the problems of malnutrition and preventable infectious diseases.

27

Disabled people must be integrated into society and accorded full respect as human beings. The responsibility for caring disabled must be of society rather than of individual concern.

28

We condemn any national and international traffic in women, Eggs and embryos, human organs, body parts, cells of DNA (genetic substance) especially for purposes of reproductive prostitution which exploits women as human incubators, in particular poor women and women in poor countries. We also strongly protest against the existence of 'body farms' and commercial adoption and surrogacy agencies.

29

We oppose the deliberate release of genetically manipulated organisms worldwide because of its unpredictable and irreversible effects on environment and health. We also consider the use of genetic engineering in laboratories and factories (biotechnology) to be tantamount to deliberate release, because

genetically manipulated organisms can be released accidentally.

30

Deliberate release of genetically manipulated organisms and safety standards in factories and research institutions are of international concern and cannot be decided by certain governments only. The impossibility of democratic control of genetic engineering on a national and international level leads us to reject all forms genetic engineering.

31

We strictly reject any laws which allow patenting of life forms and processes utilizing life forms.

32

We condemn the use of poor countries as test-sites for genetically engineered organisms or other products of genetic engineering such as bovine growth hormone, rabies vaccine etc

33

We fear that the development and application of gene technology in agriculture will repeat and



aggravate the damage done by the green revolution; in particular that it will increase the economic dependency of poor countries on rice countries and concentrate power in the hands of a few, both nationally and internationally.

34

We demand an end to technologies and policies which result in natural food being converted into more expensive unnatural food.

35

We oppose the criminalization and repression of women who are critical of genetic engineering and reproductive technologies or who are against the dehumanizing technologies.

36

We want appropriate technologies that do not violate human dignity and relations. We want them to be reversible, that is to be error friendly and contribute to preserving biological, cultural and social diversity of all living beings. The technologies must be suited to collective decision making and democratic participation and control.

## 37

We women gathered here are natural and social scientists, doctors, lawyers, health activists, journalists, demographers, development workers, community organizers, teachers, social workers, academics, who have been actively involved in issues related to women, health, human rights, education, responsible science, technology and agriculture with a women-oriented perspective in both professional and political work. Having shared our experiences, insights and knowledge, we reaffirm our deep commitment to continue and intensify our work towards a humane and just world for all. We will continue this work, despite the numerous restraints and increasing repression, both political and professional, which we face.

## 38

We appeal to all women and men to unite globally against dehumanizing technologies and express our solidarity with all those who seek to uphold and preserve the diversity of life on our planet and the integrity and dignity of all women.

*25th March 1989*

*Kotbari, Comilla*

*Bangladesh*

## ABOUT FINRRAGE

### Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering

Since the mid 1970's, women have been organising and holding meetings on reproductive technologies and genetic engineering. In 1984, there was an International interdisciplinary congress on women held in Groningen, the Netherlands. This led to the establishment of FINRRET - The Feminist International Network on New Reproductive Technologies - to monitor the developments in this area and organise an international conference.

In 1985, the Women's Emergency Conference on the new reproductive technologies was held in Sweden. 74 women came from 20 countries and the Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering (FINRRAGE) was established at that conference. The name was changed to emphasise the harm that these technologies can do to women. Three women took the decisions made in Sweden to the United Nation Decade on Women conference that was held in Nairobi in 1985 and several meetings were held there to explain the importance of what had happened in Sweden.

FINRRAGE is an international network of feminists who are critically concerned with the development of reproductive and genetic technologies and their affects on women. These technologies force a variety of different forms of reproductive control over women. FINRRAGE has emerged with a growing awareness that it is time to question the assumptions that contraceptives, new reproductive technologies and genetic engineering are benign or neutral.

**Women in FINRRAGE are committed to exploring:**

- the links between genetic engineering and reproductive technologies
- the differences in the meaning of contraceptives and new reproductive technologies for women in development and developing countries
- what the development and application of reproductive and genetic engineering will mean for women in the future as well as for women here – now.
- The relationship between science, technology and social relations and the implications for the feminist movement in general and reproductive health in particular.

Since 1984, FINRRAGE network has grown enormously. Till mid nineties, there were affiliates in more than 21 countries. In some countries women were working alone; in others, women were working

in groups and there were large network of local and regional groups in others. Some affiliates had resources and others were working with none. The issues women had had to prioritize in their strategies of resistance reflect the concerns that arose in the countries they lived in. This diversity was the important source of strength for FINRRAGE, because it allowed us to compare and learn from our differences in terms of both strategy and analysis.

From 1985, an archive was established located in Birmingham, England - of materials which women have sent in from all over the globe. An academic professional journal - Reproductive technologies and Genetic Engineering, A Journal of Feminist Analysis was associated with FINRRAGE. We also published a number of books on issues in this area. Information received by the international coordinator was sent out regularly to other members of that network and groups also organised with other women activities that were appropriate for their countries. Since 1985 the international coordination has been located in England. The International coordination was later shifted to Hamburg, Germany.

*[Taken from presentations at the conference by Jalna Hanmer, a founding member of FINRRAGE and Deborah Steinberg]*

DECLARATION OF  
PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES ON  
"POPULATION"  
SYMPOSIUM

Comilla, Bangladesh  
12-15, 1993

Organisers of the Symposium  
*UBINIG and Resistance Network*  
*(Bangladesh Research Foundation for Science*  
*and Ecology (India) Third World Network (Malaysia)*  
*and People's Health Network (India)*



# DECLARATION OF PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES ON "POPULATION" SYMPOSIUM

## **Introduction**

Between December 12 and 15 of 1993, 61 women from 23 countries from around the world met in Comilla, Bangladesh, to build and ratify a collective position on population-control programs and policies. The international symposium, Peoples Perspectives on 'Population', explored a wide range of related issues such as environmental degradation, the New Economic World Order, emergent policies (especially the upcoming International Conference on Population and development, Cairo, 1994), science and reproductive technologies, genetic engineering and language. This document is a feminist critique of the logic of domination that underlies population control policies.

In most countries population control policy is hidden behind terms and programmes such as family planning, mother-child-care and safe motherhood.



## We oppose population control because...

- Population policies are designed to control the bodies, the fertility and the lives of women, because it is women who bear children.
- Population policies have in built racist and eugenic ideologies through the process of selection of the ones who have the right to survive and dismissing everyone else, such as the indigenous, the disabled and the black. They have the goal to eliminate the poor instead of poverty.
- Population policies represent the interests of the privileged elites and a lifestyle of over-consumption in the countries of the North as well as of the elites in the Third World.
- There cannot be any feminist population polices because it violates and contradicts the basic premise of feminism.

Population-control programs are based on international collaboration between organizations such as the United States Agency for International Development, the Population Council, Rockefeller and Ford Foundation, United Nations Fund for Population Activities, and pharmaceutical

multinationals. The World Health Organization's Human Reproduction program facilitates such collaborations.

These agencies are now attempting to set the agenda for women's movements and organizations by co-opting their language and individual women to legitimize population-control policies. Although this co-optation plays a very divisive role and confuses issues, many women around the world are resisting this.

### **Language and Representation**

Population control programs were devised already in the 1950s in the name of 'poverty eradication' and containment of communism. Today they are used, supposedly, to curb environmental destruction and to ensure 'sustainable growth'. In fact, however, all over the years these programs have subjected women in the South to a whole range of coercive technologies and methods which have often ruined their health and their lives.

The population establishment attempts to hide these horrors by cloaking them in words hijacked from the women's liberation movement, and thus try to convey the message that they fall within an ethic of care and human rights; and that they expand "reproductive choice", especially for women.

Language is meant to reflect people's reality and history. Therefore we reclaim words and phrases that have been appropriated because they are part of our movement's history. It is part of our resistance to create a language which expresses our visions as well as women's reality.

Our resistance to population-control policies must never be confused with the opposition of the religious and political right to the same policies.

We reject the term 'poor' as it is usually applied to Third World Countries as they have wealth which is exploited by industrialist and capitalist concerns. We object the term 'carrying capacity' as a tool which enables the objectification of people and nature.

We reject the term 'population': people are not demographic variables. That's why our critical reflection on 'population' starts with putting the word in inverted commas.

In the present global discourse the term 'democracy' usually stands for capitalism and gives false hopes and expectations to people namely the access for all to the global supermarket.

We demand respect for the integrity of women's body, outside the confines of compulsory heterosexuality, while the religious right and

fundamentalists give primacy to the lives of fetuses, compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood.

The media have consistently equated economic and political crises in the Third World to 'population explosions'. We reject such media images which maintain the domination by the Northern and Southern collaborators, of the South.

We will demystify these terms and see to it that the interests camouflaged by this language will be brought into the open.

### **The New Economic World Order**

We are now living in a neocolonial period. Despite the fact that the colonizing powers were forced by people's resistance and national liberation movements to allow so-called 'political' independence in Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Economic dependence and external and internal colonialism continued. The new colonial institutions such as IMF and World Bank have maintained the colonisers' power.

After the oil crisis, credit based development was promoted in the South. It failed and ended in the debt crisis. To solve this crisis World Bank introduced so-called Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). In the name of Structural

Adjustment Programs, World Bank and International Monetary Fund dictated prescriptions in which the third world countries have to sacrifice health and food subsidies. Their public health and welfare infrastructure are systematically dismantled and privatized. These reduced health delivery services are technologized and virtually reduced to instruments of population control. The poor, and particularly poor women, are the main victims of this global policy everywhere.

Another aspect of this new world order is the further globalization of the world market system. The General Agreement of Tariff and Trade (GATT) signed in December 1993, intends to open up the economies of the South, particularly their agricultural sector to multinationals and biotechnology sector. Through the regime of Intellectual Property Right the privatization and commodification of all lives is intended.

With the ecological and economic crisis deepening the old colonial methods of naked violence and repression is used when needed, such as the Gulf War to ensure control of resources. It is clear that population control strategies are central to this strategy. They are continuation of war in disguise.

This remilitarization of the world has also reinforced patriarchal structures and attitudes such as violence against women, mass rapes in wars and general brutalization of everyday life. Commodification and trafficking of women are increasing.

The globalization of the world market economy has shifted and blurred boundaries between the North and the Third World. What we used to understand as the Third World (under-developed, poor) is no longer concentrated only in the South of the Planet. Poverty is also increasing and becoming a permanent feature in Northern and industrialized countries.

This globalization of the world market economy also leads to a concentration of wealth in the hands of ever fewer people and to a polarization of the societies, particularly of the South. But in many parts of the world people are actively resisting this destruction of the basis of their lives. In this process they often develop visions which go beyond the capitalist-patriarchal growth model.

## **Environment**

The growth oriented development model has led to severe environmental degradation in most parts of the world, which have, in turn, undermined

people's security and livelihoods. We reject the prevalent notion that "over-population" has a causal connection with environmental degradation.

The North, with 20% of the world's people, consumes 80% of the total resources. One of the key factors causing environmental destruction is the excessive use of energy in production and consumption. This energy is based on non-sustainable resources such as petrochemical, coal and nuclear energies. These resources are depletable and the extraction processes themselves destroy the environment. The use of such forms of energy is essential to the development of high technology which perpetuates the growth oriented development. Over-consumption in the North cannot be isolated from production patterns and technological processes, nor from the forces creating 'consumer demands'.

## **Migration**

The growth oriented development model has increased the number of poverty, environmental and political migrants and refugees. Interference of world powers with the active collaboration of the lucrative and growing armament industries has led to war, while low intensity conflict has led to further displacement of people as war refugees.

The demands of capitalism also direct the movement of low-wage labourers.

The phobia of overpopulation has not only distracted policies from the actual causes of migration, but has further victimized the victims. 65% migrants and 90% of refugees are women and children. The Northern countries in response to migration issues are making stricter laws to close the borders, while in the new free market economy, the resources and capital are flowing freely from the South to the North, dragging migrant and low wage workers with them.

Double standards are practiced when it comes to the movement of the world's citizens between those who are welcome and can afford to move freely and those who are shunned or exploited for their labour. With the signing of GATT, goods can move without restriction whereas migration remains constrained.

## **Reproductive Science and Reproductive Technologies**

Reproductive technology has been developed to control women's procreative capacity. For women in the South, population controllers promote longer acting injectable or implantable contraceptives that leave women as little room as possible to resist



contraception should they want to bear a child. A woman can 'forget' to take the Pill but once NORPLANT is inside the body, she cannot remove it herself. These maximum control contraceptives manipulate women's hormonal and immune systems effecting in long-term changes in their bodies. Ever since the 'Pill' - originally placed in the market on the basis of tests on a tiny number of Puerto Rican women, five of whom died during the testing, population controllers attention to contraceptive safety has been minimal. There is an extensive literature critiquing the shoddy science used to show the alleged safety of various contraceptives, particularly Depo-Provera, NORPLANT, the anti-pregnancy vaccine, and RU-486.

In the North, reproductive technologies serve a pro-natalist, rather than an anti-natalist goal. For example, in Japan, Quebec (Canada) and elsewhere, where the fertility rate has fallen, government and media are conducting a scare campaign that the 'population' is endangered by this fall. This campaign, along with the notion that motherhood must be central to women's lives, places pressure on women to have a child.

Many women turn to 'In Vitro' fertilization, promoted as highly effective though its failure rate

is in fact 90 percent.

Increasingly technologies are invented that are controlled by the provider, that is, the physicians, the drug companies, the state. Formerly, contraceptives, like the diaphragm, were more under the control of women (user-controlled). Whether in relation to curbing or enhancing fertility, these provider-controlled technologies effectively undermine women's control over their lives by burdening them with full responsibility for fertility and absolving men of their responsibility.

Therefore, long-acting contraceptives like NORPLANT are not an advance in contraceptive technology but an advance in control. They are purposeful instruments inspired by eugeneists whose programs of population control were designed explicitly to curtail the number of black, indigenous, disabled and poor white peoples.

We note with special concern the situation of indigenous peoples in various countries who are subjected to coercive methods of fertility control in order to appropriate their land, their commons, their culture. Their traditional family planning and health practices are discarded in favour of modern technology and practices that result in their extermination.

We are deeply concerned about the plight of people with disabilities who are often subjected to physical abuse and are being used for experimentation and implementation for contraceptive drugs and devices such as Depo-Provera and NORPLANT. Prenatal testing and embryo biopsy is aimed at determining who is worthy of being born.

Therefore we say no to amniocentesis; no to sex determination; no to embryo biopsy and the in vitro fertilization technology that makes human embryos available for manipulation.

We further oppose the industrialization and commercialization of reproduction in the surrogate mother; in vitro fertilization, and sex pre-determination clinics opened by new entrepreneurs.

### **UN-Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)**

In September 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which is largely funded by the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), will take place in Cairo, Egypt. This conference will pave the way for more population-control policies in the coming decade, based on the false assumption that

population growth threatens the survival of the planet.

We must reveal the underlying aims being set for the ICPD, which include the myth that the population growth of the South is the problem, while obscuring over-consumption and the wasteful lifestyle of the rich and the elites of the world.

### **Women's Needs**

Women's basic needs of food, education, health, work, social and political participation, a life free of violence and oppression should be addressed on their own merit. Meeting Women's need should be de-linked from population policy including those expressed as apparent humanitarian concerns for women. Women should have access to safe contraception and legal abortion under broader health care. These needs can only be met if all life is respected and accorded dignity. We demand an end to exploitation of people and the earth.

For all these reasons, we state again that we oppose population-control policies in all forms. Also there cannot be a feminist population control policy. Our voices cannot be used to legitimize a anti-women, anti-poor, anti-nature population policy.

People are not 'population'

Population control: NO!

### **People's Perspectives on 'Population'**

*Text for the press released in a press conference after the Symposium. The press conference took place on December 20, 1993 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

Between December 12 to 15 of 1993 sixty-five women from 24 countries from all around the world met in Comilla, Bangladesh, in a symposium "People's Perspective on 'Population'". The aim of the meeting was to discuss and formulate a feminist position regarding the myth spread all over the world that population growth is the main cause of ongoing and increasing poverty and environmental destruction. This propaganda not only puts the blame on poor people, especially on women, but also makes them the main target for population control policies.

The participants expect that this propaganda will be intensified and false representation of reality will be greatly aggravated before and during the upcoming INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT (ICPD) '94 in Cairo, in September, 1994.

The reality, however, is that population control

policies are based on eugenic principles to ensure that the world's resources benefit only the elites of the North and South and thus from part and parcel of the racist strategies to eliminate the poor and the people of colour. This blatant racism incorporated into the very structures of capitalist-patriarchy is now reframed as the New Economic World Order, developed in the wake of the debt crisis, the Gulf War and the present economic recession.

The present era is indeed a continuation of colonialism in different forms and all life forms are being 'colonized' more nakedly than before under the Intellectual Property Right regime. The new colonial institutions such as IMF and World Bank have maintained the colonizers' power, while Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and agreements like GATT have increased the economic and political stranglehold of the Industrial North over the South. The old colonial method of naked violence and aggression is used when needed, such as the Gulf War. It is not a surprise, therefore, that the population control establishment works in collaboration with neo-colonial global institutions such as the World Bank and IMF., foreign policy implementation agencies of the Northern powers such as USAID, corporate foundations such as Ford

and Rockefeller, Population Council, IPPF and the multi-national pharmaceutical corporations.

IT IS CLEAR THAT POPULATION CONTROL POLICIES ARE CENTRAL TO IMPERIALIST STRATEGIES AND THAT THEY ARE A CONTINUATION OF WAR IN DISGUISE TO KEEP UNDER CONTROL THE RESOURCES OF THE WORLD FOR ELITES OF THE NORTH AND THEIR COLLABORATORS IN THE SOUTH.. The claim that population is the cause of under-development or environmental degradation is a grand lie to hide the sufferings of the people caused by colonial and new colonial oppression and violence as well as to silence the resistance of the people of the world to defeat neo-colonial world (dis)order.

To camouflage their coercive and anti-women policies, population controllers coopt the language and concepts developed during the women's liberation movement. These are, e.g. 'reproductive rights', 'free choice', 'women's needs', 'empowerment of women', etc. The population controllers pretend to be the allies of women, whereas they are actually using women's bodies and their lives to further their interests and to perpetuate the inherently destructive, profit-greedy and ego-centric capitalist patriarchal growth model which we

reject. As part of this strategy, the Population Control Establishments develop on even more coercive, invasive, long-acting and provider-controlled contraceptive technologies.

The growth oriented development model has led to sever environmental degradation in most parts of the world, which have, in turn, undermined peoples' security and livelihoods. We reject the prevalent notion that "overpopulation" has a causal connection with environmental degradation.

The North, with 20% of the world's people, consumes 80% of the total resources. One of the key factors causing environmental destruction is the excessive use of energy in production and consumption. This energy is based on non-sustainable resources such as petrochemicals, coal and uranium. These resources are depletable and the extraction and production processes themselves destroy the environment. Moreover, this growth model produces an ever-increasing waste, most of which is toxic, which is often disposed in Third World Countries. The use of such forms of energy is essential to the development of high technology which perpetuates the growth oriented development. Over-consumption in the North cannot be isolated from production patterns and technological processes nor from the forces



creating "consumer demands".

Women's basic needs of food, education, health, work, social and political participation and a life free of violence and oppression should be addressed on their own merit. Meeting women's needs should be de-linked from population policy including those expressed as apparent humanitarian concerns for women. Women should have access to safe contraception and legal abortion under broader health care. These needs can only be met if all life is respected and accorded dignity. We demand an end to exploitation of people and the Earth.

**For all these reasons we state again that there can not be a feminist population control policy and our voices can not be used to legitimize anti-women, anti-poor and anti-nature population control policies.**

## About UBINIG & Narigrantha Prabartana

**UBINIG** is the abbreviation of its Bengali name Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshona. In English it means Policy Research for Development Alternative. It started in 1984 as a research organisation.

Through our works at national and international level UBINIG is known as an organization which have created a movement against population control policies as a coercive and anti-poor policy. We fight against the ideological notion by which depopulating strategies equate population control with family planning. We also fight against the violence done against women in promoting unsafe, modern but harmful contraceptive methods that benefit the multinational corporations and other vested interested groups.

For the countries in the West, countries like Bangladesh is an "excellent" place to conduct biomedical research on human subjects, especially on women and children. Research of unsafe contraceptive method is being done on women without letting them know that they are subjects of biomedical research. UBINIG uncovered the unethical research practice of NORPLANT, a long-acting implant contraceptive, in Bangladesh. We undertook campaign works to resist this practice and are working to aware people about the "Violence against Women by



Harmful, Coercive Contraceptive Methods”.

We want to make people aware about “Violation of Informed Consent” as described in the Helsinki Declaration and are carrying out a campaign to ensure the informed decision of the couples about family planning. Rights of women to take decision in this respect is important and we want to protect her from patriarchal oppression.

We have published books, booklets, posters and write articles in the national and international journal, magazines regularly. We have produced a video documentary on issues related to violence against women by unsafe contraceptives. We also organize and actively participate in seminars, workshops, conferences at national, regional and international level to share and disseminate information. We keep contacts with different national and international networks working on this issue.

After the FINRRAGE-UBINIG conference in 1989, UBINIG organised meetings with like -minded persons and formed a network, “Network to Resist Abuse of Contraceptives on Women’s Health”, widely known as “Resistance Network” to continue work at the national level.

**Narigrantha Prabartana** is a women’s resource centre and a place for women; it is also an active space for social activism and policy advocacy. Narigrantha Prabartana is also a well-known publisher in Bangladesh for books written by women and on women’s issues.

