

# The United Nations Population Award Acceptance Speech

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Chair

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Your Excellency, Asha-Rose Migiro, UN Deputy Secretary–General;  
Madame Thoraya Obaid, UNFPA Executive Director and Secretary to the Committee for the United Nations Population Award;  
Distinguished Members of the Committee for the United Nations Population Award;  
Excellencies;  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

## **1. Introduction**

May I begin by congratulating our fellow laureates, Bill and Melinda Gates, for their extraordinary commitment to population and development issues and for their well-deserved recognition today.

As Chair of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) it is with great pleasure and honor that I receive the United Nations Population Award on its behalf.

First of all, I would like to recognize that the Award honors the thirty years of continuous efforts made by my fellow parliamentarians in the Asian and Pacific region; as well as their national committees, in addressing the issues of population and development. It also honors the pioneers before us who took on the challenge, with dedication and inspiration, and all those who are today actively committed to resolving those issues.

Our activities have been carried out from a shared conviction that the resolution of population issues is essential in order to realize sustainable development around the world, even as we engage ourselves every day to improve the lives of our people and to achieve world peace.

AFPPD was established by the initiative of parliamentarians from Japan, China, India, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines who shared the same philosophy and sense of urgency – these parliamentary activities now reach all corners of the globe.

With the founding of AFPPD in 1982, the Global Committee of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (GCPPD) was established as a central institution to encourage the formation of regional groups. These now include the Inter-American Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (IAPG); the Forum of African and Arab Parliamentarians on Population and Development (FAAPPD); and the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF), which all work in partnership with each other, focusing on its specific needs.

## **2. Impetus for starting parliamentary activities on issues of population**

As it is universally acknowledged now, population issues are not just simply a matter of statistics. Each statistic is a number that represents an individual person's life – these lives comprise our societies. It is as elected representatives of these societies – made up of individuals, families and communities – whose aspirations we, as parliamentarians, listen to- and reflect in our legislative work.

Japan's experience with population issues stood as an example for parliamentarians. After the

Second World War, there were many impoverished people in Japan – the high fertility rate accelerated poverty.

It was recognized at the time that there was an urgent need to improve the conditions in rural communities and in 1955 the “New Life Movement” was introduced by the government to raise the standard of living through income generation and family planning. As a result, rural families were able to improve their health, as well as their income. This led to a rapid decline of the high infant mortality and fertility rates, and made Japan the first non-Western country to achieve demographic transition.

Japan’s demographic transition and economic development took place almost simultaneously. While economic development contributed to the resolution of population problems, the change in population structure created an extremely advantageous situation for economic development, which supported the high growth in Japan.

It was then that Japan’s parliamentarians visited Asian countries and saw how high population growth rates were deepening poverty, and how – as a result – innocent children were actually being born on the streets to die on the streets.

In 1970, the growth rate of the world population was above 2% and it was feared that – if the population were to continue to grow at the same rate – it would reach 17.5 billion by 2050. Such rapid population growth would bring about untold poverty and result in destroying our Earth’s environment. A strong sense of urgency motivated parliamentarians to embrace the issue as their own political agenda.

### **3. The roles of parliamentarians in resolving population issues**

Population issues can never be forced. The resolution of population issues critically calls for an understanding by each individual, as well as measures that are acceptable in terms of his and her cultural and religious background.

Parliamentarians enact laws and allocate budgets. Asian Parliamentarians who witnessed situations in their respective countries, where poverty was caused by population growth, enacted necessary laws and mobilized the necessary budgets for dealing with the circumstances.

These successes in the population arena have inspired various parliamentary groups that address different needs – I believe that given the nature of population issues, parliamentary activities on population have the most essential implications than another fields.

### **4. Contemporary population issues—in the context of sustainable development**

Solving population issues is at the heart of development. While social and economic development can have a positive impact on the population, stabilizing the population builds a foundation for economic development and the next essential step for realizing sustainable development.

From this perspective, AFPPD has – over the years – embraced the problems of food security, the environment, freshwater resources and gender issues, together with initiatives in the areas of population and health.

Today, climate change has become a real issue because the way we live now has had a large impact on the environment. Climate change has an enormous impact on women and children living in poverty in the developing areas of the world, and on populations that are socially marginalized.

With this in mind, we organized a parliamentarians meeting in Laos in April focusing on “Population and Adaptation to Climate Change”. The meeting adopted a Statement highlighting effective population policies as one of the adaptation measures to climate change. This Statement was then shared with regional parliamentary fora and G8 countries.

We parliamentarians have been involved in fieldwork beyond simply adopting and communicating international appeals, and in working to improve our own understanding of the intertwined issues of population and development.

Let me cite some activities by AFPPD members:

In 2006, our parliamentary members went to Rajasthan in India, to see for themselves the situation with regard to population, and to exchange views on what needed to be done. They visited a hamlet on the outskirts of Udaipur and sat down with HIV/AIDS workers who had also been infected.

At that time, our members proposed an income-generation project for the poor such as intercropping of oriental herbal medicine, adding to the already existing afforestation project.

At the end of April, following the parliamentarians’ meeting in Laos, we organized a study tour for Asian parliamentarians to observe conditions in the field regarding population and development. The group visited the Nam Theun Two Hydroelectric Project located in a mountainous area of the country and met with farmers who had been relocated for the dam construction.

We parliamentarians do not visit the field just to see how people live; we have also provided practical, well-grounded advice in an attempt to improve many programs comprehensively.

For example, the idea of ODA programs integrating the construction of infrastructure such as roads and ports with an HIV/AIDS prevention program – which is highly commended throughout the world today – originally came from our parliamentarian initiatives.

In the year 2000, it was feared that development assistance involving the construction of ports in Sihanoukville, Cambodia would increase HIV/AIDS morbidity by 1%, with an influx of construction workers at high risk of HIV infection.

There were two separate development assistance organizations involved in the project: one supporting port construction and the other advocating HIV/AIDS prevention. The barriers between these specialized organizations stood in the way of solving the problem. Parliamentarians with a profound understanding of development assistance took the political leadership to coordinate between the mandates of the two organizations.

Success was replicated not just in Asia but in many parts of Africa where public works were undertaken in conjunction with HIV/AIDS prevention projects.

For the last thirty years we have worked continuously on the ground to realize the wellbeing of people in Asia and beyond — for all humankind. This mission has inspired us to strive to raise the awareness of population-related problems and to enact necessary laws in our countries.

## **5. New initiatives in parliamentarian activities**

More than ever before, greater international cooperation is essential if we are to resolve global issues and realize sustainable development. Given the realities, however, I fear that development assistance is confronting a major bottleneck.

Most of the developed countries that have been providing development funds are experiencing

structural changes within the population — that is, low birth rates and aging, which has increased the burden of social security and exerted significant fiscal pressure. It is becoming much more difficult to get taxpayers to channel diminishing funds into international development aid.

Given this reality, it is important to win the understanding of our voters and taxpayers. And that requires us to clearly show how development aid has been used and what effect it has had.

This is where parliamentarians are called on to play an important role.

By utilizing parliamentary networks, we have built strong partnerships among all of us in different political parties and in different countries. These networks can be used as a tool to promote transparency and accountability, and clearly show the impact of funds used for development cooperation.

For this purpose we have begun a program of expanding development aid by partnering with regional parliamentarians for a through deepening understanding of citizens in both the developed and developing countries.

We are urging parliamentarians' participation in this program; not just in the Asian region but also in the African and the Arab world, the Americas, and the European region.

What is important is to build a strong relationship between developing and developed countries, with citizens of developing countries as stakeholders tackling development issues and supported; while support by taxpayers in developed countries — who have assurance of transparent and accountable uses of resources — being much appreciated and well utilized by developing countries.

In moving forward, we would like to further strengthen our comprehensive partnerships with UNFPA and other specialized organizations of the UN, international, regional, and local NGOs to make the future bright and hopeful for all members of the human race.

## **6. In conclusion**

The UN Secretary-General recently issued a report on Human Security, which reportedly generated fruitful discussion in the General Assembly.

“Human Security” aims at building a society where individuals can enjoy their rights and develop their human potential, by ensuring “freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom to live with dignity”.

Let me say in conclusion that we, parliamentarians, will continue — with all of you present today — to play important roles in every part of the world to resolve population issues, achieve sustainable development and to ensure human security.

The honor we receive does not mean that we have reached our objective. But it gives us an ever-greater incentive to take new initiatives and try new things.

Again, I would like to share this honor with all the pioneers around the world who are- and have been involved in population and development, and with fellow parliamentarians who will be taking on the challenges of these crucial issues in the future.

Thank you very much.