

UN Resolution on Human Rights Aspects of Family Planning (1968)

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Between April 22 and May 13, 1968, the United Nations held the International Conference on Human Rights in Tehran, which brought together 83 state representatives to take stock of global human rights developments. At the time of the conference, the UN human rights regime suffered from a lack of binding instruments. Widespread discontent about the nature of human rights became apparent during the proceedings in Tehran. Also, in retrospect, providing a stage for the authoritarian Iranian Shah regime to present itself as a defender of human rights seems bizarre. While references to the unsuccessful Tehran conference have largely disappeared from the UN's own historical records, Resolution XVIII, called the Human Rights Aspects of Family Planning, is still cited today. This resolution effectively declared a human right to use contraception, and is seen today as a forerunner of contemporary reproductive rights. Yet it was passed at a time when overpopulation was a serious concern: the resolution states that continuous and increasing population growth would endanger the realization of human rights.

Genesis

Concerns about overpopulation became a dominant feature of the post-1945 discourse. Early books published in the late 1940s, like *Road to Survival* by William Vogt and *Our Plundered Planet* by Fairfield Osborn, predicted that continuous population growth would bring about the end of human civilization. Following on from these books, a growing number of biologists, economists, and environmental activists *avant la lettre* voiced similar concerns about the growing number of people.

Fears about the consequences of overpopulation reached a peak near the time of the Tehran conference. A few months previously, Stanford University biologist Paul R. Ehrlich and his wife Anne had submitted their first draft of the widely cited and critiqued *Population Bomb*. The book recommended the widespread distribution of contraceptives to avert the deaths of hundreds of millions of people due to overpopulation during the 1970s.

Anxieties about the effects of population growth were shared by influential and wealthy foundations, private organizations, transnational activists and national political leaders, which financed, prepared, and administered programmes designed to curb population growth. They supported research to find new forms of contraceptives and conducted experiments to understand the motives behind couples' decisions to have large families. By 1972, 26 countries had set up family planning clinics that offered contraception to local populations, including sterilizations, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and – in smaller numbers – the contraceptive pill. Most of these countries were in Asia, Latin America, and Northern Africa and contained nearly one-third of the world's population.

As historians have shown, the alarmism of the overpopulation discourse may have produced negative consequences for participants of these programmes. For instance, contraceptives like the IUD were distributed before they had been proven to be safe. Coercive forms of birth control programmes were also implemented. For example, India introduced forced sterilizations, in Kenya, negative side effects were not mentioned in order to get more people to accept these programmes, and in the Philippines workers in family planning clinics gave women a limited choice by not distributing contraceptive methods they thought to be less effective.¹ The overriding aim of these programmes was to reduce fertility rates rather than to support individual choice.

Therefore it is surprising that human rights language was employed in the Tehran conference's Resolution XVIII to support such initiatives, instead of critiquing practices that were ignorant of individual needs. But the resolution could not have been any clearer in stating its main concerns: "The present rapid rate of population growth in some areas of the world hampers the struggle against hunger and poverty, and in particular reduces the possibilities of rapidly achieving adequate standards of living, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, social security, education and social services, thereby impairing the full realization of human rights."

Three main factors contributed to linking human rights to a population control programme in Resolution XVIII. First, during the 1960s, private organizations used humanitarian and human rights language to justify population control measures and win support for their programmes. In the context of the Cold War, Western government officials were worried that any support for population control would hand the Soviet Union an easy propaganda victory against the West. To fill the gap in state activity, private US groups such as the Ford or Rockefeller foundations funded organizations like the Population Council and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

While private organizations were leading the global population control efforts, attempts to reduce fertility rates needed state support. To significantly reduce the rapid population growth, large funds as well as institutional support from national health systems were necessary. Private organizations tried to build alliances of states that supported the idea of population control.

One such initiative was led by the Population Council and its founder, John D. Rockefeller III. In 1967, Rockefeller recruited 30 heads of state (representing 39 percent of the global population) to sign a joint statement that advocated population control using the language of humanitarianism and human rights. While the "Declaration of Population" argued that "the problem of unplanned population growth" would be so severe that it "threatens the world," it promised a utopian future should fertility rates be lowered. "The objective of family planning," the statement argued "is the enrichment of human life, not its restriction; that family planning, by assuring greater opportunity to each person, frees man to attain his individual dignity and reach his full potential." Further, "the opportunity to decide the number and spacing of children" was declared to be a "basic human right."²

These narratives successfully gained the support of governments. Countries of the global south in particular, including authoritarian regimes, expressed their support for the human

rights framework. In a letter to Rockefeller, Moroccan Foreign Minister Ahmed Laraki expressed the “strong wish” of King Hassan II to incorporate the human rights references to population control into the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Tunisian ambassador to the US, Rachid Driss, called the references to human rights “most appropriate.” And Iranian Shah Reza Pahlavi argued that he supported the statement since population control would contribute to the “well being of people everywhere.”³

The second factor linking human rights to population control was that leading UN officials close to Secretary-General U Thant employed Rockefeller’s declaration and its references to human rights to advance their own agenda. Within the UN, the issues of population growth and overpopulation were highly contested until the mid-1960s. Catholic and communist countries regularly rejected any policy proposals brought up in UN commissions that aimed to negatively influence reproductive behaviour.

U Thant and his close associates saw themselves as internationalists concerned with global problems, and were eager to change the UN’s political abstention on population matters. For the UN leadership, the human rights narrative was a welcome way to facilitate the desired policy change. Given that Rockefeller’s declaration was a private initiative that sought to forge a multilateral coalition outside the UN, U Thant could support the cause without having to rely on the votes of UN delegates. On November 18, 1966, U Thant, de Seynes, and the UN Bureau of Social Affairs director Julia Henderson met with Rockefeller and one of his assistants in the secretary-general’s office on the 38th floor at UN headquarters in New York to discuss a possible collaboration. They agreed on the basic substance of the declaration – treating population growth as a fundamental problem for future human development. Soon, human rights became the focus of their discussion. Although the declaration only briefly referenced human rights, the meeting’s participants agreed that they should become its main selling point.

In the meeting, U Thant agreed to present the declaration on December 10, 1966, which the UN had declared international Human Rights Day (the anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, UDHR). In an accompanying press release, U Thant strongly emphasized the connections between population growth and human rights. He expressed “concern with the quality of human life as well as with the number of human beings on earth” and argued that the UN “must accord the right of parents to determine the numbers of their children a place of importance at this moment in man’s history.” For the UN secretary-general, “the problem of the growing food shortage cannot be solved without in many cases a simultaneous effort to moderate population growth.” He therefore concluded that seeing population control as a human right would only be appropriate “as freedom from hunger, the right to medical services and the right to education are already considered to be basic human rights.”⁴

The focus on the negative consequences of population growth rather than individual rights to family planning was supported by a third factor: many developing countries supported global population control initiatives. In the context of the increasing relevance of the discipline of development economics of the 1950s and 1960s, several developing countries saw high population growth rates as an obstacle to their modernization. For example, India, one of the main countries of concern in the overpopulation discourse, had included

measures to combat population growth in its first five-year plan adopted in 1951. The promise of social progress as a human right, which became an important *raison d'être* for the postcolonial Indian state, was seen to be endangered due to high population growth. In 1952, Indian Vice-President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan argued that India had committed itself “to this doctrine of human rights.” As the Indian state would not be able to fulfil its commitment should population growth rates remain so high, “we have to do something to limit population,” he concluded.⁵ If population growth stood in the way of progress, some protagonists felt justified in limiting the number of children couples had. In 1959, India’s deputy foreign minister, Lakshmi N. Menon, declared that “parents have no right to throw an indefinite number of children to the care of the State.”⁶

In the preparation of and during the 1968 Tehran conference, all three of these protagonists – private organizations, the UN leadership, and developing countries – provided crucial support for adopting Resolution XVIII on the Human Rights Aspects of Family Planning. Private organizations like the IPPF campaigned to include population growth on the conference’s agenda. After the Population Council, the IPPF was the most important organization for implementing population control programmes. Its wide network of branches in 52 countries all over the globe enabled it to build national pressure and to facilitate transnational exchanges at its conferences. In 1967, the IPPF launched an energetic human rights campaign in favour of population control. In a special issue of its magazine, *Planned Parenthood News*, the organization listed a number of human rights it predicted would be negatively affected should population growth not be reduced.⁷ And in a letter to the UN preparatory committee in April 1968, the IPPF urged the UN to include population growth on the agenda of the Tehran conference. It warned that otherwise, “the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights cannot be achieved or maintained.”⁸

While the UN did not want to prioritize population growth and family planning over other human rights concerns, U Thant made sure that the issue remained relevant. He commissioned a study on the relationships between family planning and human rights, which was conducted by the renowned French demographer Alfred Sauvy. In his opening remarks in Tehran’s parliamentary building, the UN secretary-general reminded the delegates of Rockefeller’s declaration, and stated that “the opportunity to decide the number and spacing of children is a fundamental human right.”⁹

Yet the general debates at the Tehran conference hardly touched on population growth; discussions centred on major global conflicts such as (post)colonialism, South Africa, and contested Cold War issues like the recognition of China. One of the major issues running through the conference was the discussion of the conflicts in the Middle East following the 1967 Six-Day War, often accompanied by wild anti-Semitic claims (like the statement by the Bulgarian delegate, who argued that “the Jews themselves had become the agents of racism and aggression”).¹⁰

While discussions of population growth were not a priority, the conflicts between UN member states on the issue were highlighted in a debate during the 11th plenary meeting on April 29. After the Swedish delegate referred to family planning as a woman’s right, Cuban delegate Carlos E. Alfaro took the opportunity to attack Western “imperialism” and “neo-Malthusianism.” “How was it possible,” he asked, “to speak of the rights of children

and of the family when imperialism had embraced the so-called ‘population explosion’ theory with its Neo-Malthusian implications; The imperialists wished to put an end to poverty by eliminating the poor, but surely in the present state of knowledge no limit could be set to the number of human beings which the earth could support.”¹¹

While none of the delegates responded to these accusations, at the subsequent plenary meetings on April 29 and 30, other delegates briefly spoke about the issue. The Belgian delegate talked about “various perils” befalling the globe, including “overpopulation,” and the Pakistani delegate argued that “unchecked growth of population was one of the major obstacles to the improvement of living standards in the developing countries.”¹² Charles Weitz, who represented the UN Food and Agriculture Organization at the UN headquarters in New York stated that the deficiencies in food production would have to be addressed in order to deal with the “population explosion.”¹³

After these brief exchanges, further discussion of population matters was referred to the Second Committee of the conference. At the committee’s fifth meeting on May 1, an alliance of ten countries – all of which were signatories of Rockefeller’s declaration – tabled a draft of Resolution XVIII. The supporters of the resolution were constituted by three Western countries, Finland, Sweden, and the UK; two South Asian countries, India, and Pakistan; three Northern African countries, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt; the socialist Yugoslavia; and the Latin American Chile. With little debate, the resolution was adopted by 49 votes to 0 with 7 abstentions (it is not documented who abstained).¹⁴

Austrian UN delegate and head of the Second Committee, Willibald Bahr, reported on the committee’s work in a plenary session. During the subsequent discussion only Petr E. Nedbailo, the Ukrainian representative on the UN Human Rights Commission, spoke against Resolution XVIII. He argued that his delegation did not believe “that population growth was having a decisive influence on the exercise of human rights in the sense of the text.”¹⁵ Without any further comments, several resolutions, including the one on family planning, were adopted as part of the Second Committee’s report.

Content

The adopted resolution was structured in a way common to UN resolutions and consisted of two main parts. The first part referred to six UN documents and Rockefeller’s declaration to present the current resolution as part of a historical continuum of UN understandings of human rights. The second part described the connection between population growth and human rights. This section explains each paragraph of the resolution in detail, including any references made. The resolution begins:

The International Conference on Human Rights, Recalling the determination of the peoples of the United Nations, as expressed in the Charter, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

This paragraph places the resolution in the context of the wider history of the UN Charter

adopted at the San Francisco Conference in 1945 without further explaining the reference. While it mentioned UN support for human rights in general terms, the resolution did not make it clear how the UN Charter would specifically support its policies. This is particularly noteworthy, since commentators had openly criticized the UN for not sufficiently addressing population growth in the early years. Frederick Osborn, author of *Our Plundered Planet*, had argued that the San Francisco conference and other UN meetings would “prove meaningless and futile until this issue is met.”¹⁶

The resolution’s next paragraph was more specific and referred to Article 16 of the UDHR: “Considering that article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states *inter alia* that men and women of full age have the right to marry and found a family and that the family is the natural and fundamental group of society.”

UDHR Article 16 consists of three paragraphs and declares that men and women “of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family” and that they are “entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.” It also declares that marriage requires the full consent of both spouses and that the family is “the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.” None of the articles refer to family planning or population growth. Nor did the discussions during the UDHR’s drafting process in the UN Human Rights Commission between 1947 and 1948 declare any limits to the right to “found a family” or touch upon population growth at all.¹⁷

Population control advocates started to employ UDHR article 16 to support their agenda in the 1960s. For example, the article became part of the IPPF’s human rights campaign prior to the Tehran conference. The IPPF argued it would support family planning, as “family life is threatened and often destroyed when the economic and health strains of too many children and too little resources become unendurable.”¹⁸ But given the historical origins of the article, its connection to family planning suggested by the IPPF represented not a continuum but a clear break from previous understandings. The resolution’s next two paragraphs referred to several UN documents and resolutions on family planning:

Recalling General Assembly resolution 2211 (XXI) of 17 December 1966, which recognized *inter alia* the sovereignty of nations in formulating and promoting their own population policies, with due regard to the principle that the size of the family should be the free choice of each individual family, Recalling also UNESCO resolution 3.252 of 14 December 1966, the World Health Assembly’s resolution WHA 20.41 of 25 May 1967 and the conclusions of the World Population Conference held at Belgrade in September 1965 on the subject of family planning.

The resolutions referred to in this paragraph touched on population questions but did not yet link population growth to negative consequences. UN General Assembly Resolution 2211 (XXI), entitled *Population Growth and Economic Development*, asserted that the UN was “concerned about the growing food shortage in the developing countries” but mainly asked for further studies by the UN Economic and Social Council and the UN Population Commission. Resolution 3.252 adopted by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), entitled *Education and Evolution of Population*, was even more

limited in scope as it only authorized UNESCO Director René Maheu to commission studies on the relationship between population growth and education as long as their costs did not exceed \$60,000 for the financial year 1967/1968. World Health Organization (WHO) Resolution 20.41 went a step further. While it authorized WHO to help member states implement family planning programmes – the first time a UN agency took such a step – it maintained that “knowledge with regard to human reproduction is still insufficient.” And although the World Population Conference in Belgrade discussed matters of family planning, it abstained from any policy recommendations.

The resolution’s next paragraph referred to a study by the UN Commission on the Status of Women: “Noting with interest that the Commission on the Status of Women has begun to study the relationship between family planning and the status of women...”

Two weeks before the Tehran conference, the UN Economic and Social Council invited the UN Commission on the Status of Women to conduct a study on the interrelationship between family planning and the status of women. But the study’s final report was presented seven years after the conference, which underlines that family planning, when it became a human rights issue, was primarily concerned with population growth rather than women’s rights.¹⁹

The next paragraph again referred to Rockefeller’s declaration and is the final reference to other resolutions: “Noting also the Declaration on Population of 10 December 1966, now signed by 30 Heads of State or Government...”

The next paragraphs in the resolution’s second part presented three specific points on the relationship between population and human rights. They stated that (1) a “rapid rate of population growth” would “hamper” the realization of human rights; (2) that, in turn, a moderation of this rate would offer “greater opportunities for the enjoyment of human rights”; and (3) declared couples’ human right to “freely and responsibly” decide on the number and spacing of their children. A fourth point urged UN member states and agencies to “give close attention” to the human rights implications of population growth. The resolution stated:

“Believing that it is timely to draw attention to the connexion between population growth and human rights,

1. Observes that the present rapid rate of population growth in some areas of the world hampers the struggle against hunger and poverty, and in particular reduces the possibilities of rapidly achieving adequate standards of living, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, social security, education and social services, thereby impairing the full realization of human rights;
2. Recognizes that moderation of the present rate of population growth in such areas would enhance the conditions for offering greater opportunities for the enjoyment of human rights and the improvement of living conditions for each person;
3. Considers that couples have a basic human right to decide freely and responsibly on the

number and spacing of their children and a right to adequate education and information in this respect;

4. Urges Member States and United Nations bodies and specialized agencies concerned to give close attention to the implications for the exercise of human rights of the present rapid rate of increase in world population.”

Impact

On the few occasions the UN referred to population growth in statements before the 1968 Tehran conference, it pointed to the possible effects on economic development. These early resolutions were not as clear in ascribing negative effects to population growth, and were limited in the actions they allowed. Hence, the adoption of the resolution in Tehran represented a shift in the argumentative framework and a clear expansion in political positions towards population matters. While not entirely rejecting the development paradigm, the resolution was more explicit than previous documents in ascribing negative consequences – the endangerment of human rights – to high population growth rates.

Still, the resolution was not binding. Its impact depended on how widely it was taken up by state and non-state actors to inform or justify their policies. In the years following the Tehran conference, there were widespread references to the resolution. These references served a diverse number of political agendas resulting from the contradictory formulation of the human right, as it stated that couples should exercise it both “freely” and “responsibly.”

Western states reluctant to support family planning due to Cold War conflicts were now provided with a new justification. After the Tehran conference, the US State Department sent a letter to all embassies suggesting that they urge governments to adopt population control measures by referring to the newly adopted human right. And when US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, commissioned his National Security Council (NSC) to develop a new policy on population growth in 1974, human rights were used to justify global interventions. The NSC hoped to avert potential accusations of covert “imperialist” interventions. National Security Memorandum 200, entitled “Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests,” argued that “The U.S. can help to minimize charges of an imperialist motivation behind its support of population activities by repeatedly asserting that such support derives from a concern with: (a) the right of the individual couple to determine freely and responsibly their number and spacing of children and to have information, education, and means to do so; and (b) the fundamental social and economic development of poor countries in which rapid population growth is both a contributing cause and a consequence of widespread poverty.”²⁰

While the resolution focussed on the effects of population growth on developing countries, it was also recognized by social movements in Western countries for which overpopulation was not a concern. In Ireland, for example, selling, buying, and importing contraceptives was illegal until 1980. Activists referred to the resolution to bolster their political demands of legalization. The IPPF-affiliated Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) campaigned against the law banning contraception and argued in letters to the Irish prime minister that

the country would violate internationally established human rights if it did not legalize contraception.²¹ One of the IFPA's publications – a guide to family planning methods – cited the Tehran resolution as a justification for their work in Ireland.²² And when the Irish Parliament debated the legalization of contraception in the late 1970s, advocates of legalization referred to the human rights implications of the issue.

But human rights references could also be employed in a different context. Building on a tradition of a collective interpretation of human rights in development and modernization discourse, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi justified the 8.1 million forced sterilizations carried out during the Indian emergency between 1975 and 1977. Some of them, like government employees, were threatened with job loss if they did not comply. In 1976, Gandhi gave a speech at a medical conference explaining the necessity of coercive measures to reduce population growth. She argued that the limitation of personal rights would be necessary in order to secure the nation's development. "We should not hesitate," Gandhi argued, "to take steps which might be described as drastic. Some personal rights have to be kept in abeyance, for the human rights of the nation, the right to live, the right to progress."²³ Although coercive sterilizations during the emergency were part of the reason for Gandhi's removal from power in 1977, collective understandings of human rights remained vital after she became prime minister again in 1980. In a speech at the UN in 1983, Gandhi argued that "One could say that the death rate is brought down by the community's responsibility to the individual, and the birth rate by the individual's responsibility to the community."²⁴

Human rights interpretations not only differed between developed and developing countries; they were also ideologically contested along Cold War fronts. Yugoslavia, for example, integrated the right to "decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of children" in its 1974 constitution.²⁵ And while Titoist Yugoslavia was one of the sponsors of the resolution at the Tehran conference, it engaged in an ideological battle with what it believed to be a Western human rights understanding. Vida Tomšič, the director of the Yugoslav Family Planning Council, established in 1963 as a state institution, attacked Western human rights conceptions of family planning. In discussing the contradictions between freedom and responsibility in the Tehran resolution, she argued that only a socialist society would be able to "overcome the conflict between the individual human right to free and responsible parenthood, on the one hand, and social population policy, on the other."²⁶ In socialist societies, Tomšič asserted, the will of the people is identical to that of the state; therefore only socialism can develop demographic policies in line with human rights.

In addition to these differing regional interpretations, the UN grappled internally with the meaning of the declared human right in the years after the Tehran conference, and never resolved the issue. The UN leadership and its specialized agencies like UNESCO emphasized the responsibility of individuals and the right of communities to limit the number of children; they referred to UDHR Article 29, which declared that individuals had certain "duties to the community."²⁷ Others argued in favour of individual choice and rejected the idea that states or communities would be authorized to limit the number of children couples were allowed to have. In 1974, the UN held a symposium on "Population and Human Rights" in Amsterdam that aimed to resolve this issue but ultimately failed to reach

a compromise.²⁸

While parts of the UN Population Division and the UN Human Rights Division would have preferred to specify the terms of the resolution, the lack of clarity also contributed to the wide transnational transfers as the specific meaning remained open for interpretation. Also, the references to human rights helped to expand the UN's ability to directly provide financial and technical assistance to population control programmes in member states. In 1967, U Thant authorized the creation of a United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). UNFPA Director Rafael Salas stated in 1977 that he believed framing overpopulation as a human rights problem had been crucial in securing sufficient funds: "Family planning," Salas argued, "has been removed from the polemics of 'population versus development' and is identified as a health and welfare measure as well as a human rights-oriented measure, both of which can contribute to demographic change." As a result, Salas concluded, population growth would "no longer [be] the controversial subject it once was."²⁹

The resolution's further impact was determined by new actors who started to intervene in the debate on a global level. In the mid-1970s, a small group of international lawyers emerged who specialized in population questions. They discussed whether the Tehran human rights resolution was binding, and whether it would allow communities to coercively determine a maximum number of children.³⁰ Lawyers also started to work in specific countries to analyse legal situations in population matters. Legal scholars, funded by the UN or developmental government agencies like the US Agency for International Development, also suggested to governments to remove legal obstacles to obtaining contraceptives.³¹

The longest-lasting effect came from another new actor emerging in the 1970s, the international women's movement, which became relevant both inside and outside of the UN. In 1975, Helvi Sipilä, the first woman to be elected UN deputy secretary-general (in 1972), presented a study on the relationship between family planning and women's rights. She emphasized that individual women, rather than couples, should have the right to use contraception and to determine how many children they have.³² In addition, the 1975 UN Mexico City Women's conference adapted the demands of the Tehran resolution and stated: "Every couple and every individual has the right to decide freely and responsibly whether or not to have children as well as to determine their number and spacing, and to have information, education and means to do so."³³ It added individuals and the right not to have children to the original text of Resolution XVIII.

These interventions brought a social dimension to questions of family planning. Family planning organizations and programmes were receptive to such interventions. Particularly in the 1970s, the leadership of some organizations felt that their campaigns did not reach enough people. Seeing women not only as objects of intervention but as actors who, provided with educational opportunities and new social roles, would intrinsically want to limit their number of children became the new approach to expanding family planning.

The link between human rights, family planning, and women's social advancement remains crucial. When the term "reproductive rights" was coined in the 1990s, the positive

effects for women were as important as the promise of a more efficient way of reducing fertility rates. For example, Ruth Dixon-Mueller, who closely worked with Sipilä on the 1975 report on the effects of family planning on women, highlighted this mutually beneficial relationship. In 1993, Dixon-Mueller argued that a policy approach focussing on the social advancement of women could “(1) legitimize efforts at population regulation; (2) promote their effectiveness, efficiency, and equity; and (3) win the support of advocates of human rights, women’s rights, and reproductive freedom, who should be natural allies in a common endeavour.”³⁴

Studying the genesis and impact of Resolution XVIII adopted at the 1968 UN conference on human rights reveals a surprising history of how human rights became connected to a global agenda of population control. Tracing its roots to initiatives of non-state actors like the Population Council and the IPPF demonstrates the importance of private organizations for facilitating policy change at the UN. It also provides an example of a wider feature of the UN human rights regime: the conflicts between individual and collective rights. Both of these categories were present in the UDHR. While the first 28 articles referred to individual or family rights, articles 29 and 30 address individuals’ duties towards the community. These duties were not enumerated, why their interpretation changed given different political interpretations of what these duties would include. The resolution is therefore a good example of the importance of global political changes as well as regional actors in interpreting international human rights resolutions.

Annotated Bibliography

Roland Burke: *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*. Philadelphia 2011.

Roland Burke: *From Individual Rights to National Development. The First UN International Conference on Human Rights, Tehran, 1968*, in: *Journal of World History* 19:3 (2008), pp. 275–296.

In these two contributions, Roland Burke provides the historical context for the UN International Conference on Human Rights that took place in Tehran in 1968. In a compelling analysis, he argues that the conference represented a change from the individual human rights understandings of the 1940s to interpretations focussing on national development. He demonstrates that demands for economic development and economic rights superseded political and civil rights. Burke demonstrates that this shift made it possible for many post-colonial authoritarian regimes to embrace the human rights agenda and utilize their majority in the UN General Assembly without having to commit to political liberalization in their own countries. Resolution XVIII is both a confirmation and an exception to Burke’s analysis. While it is concerned with the rights of individual families and not states or regions, the human rights it sees endangered by population growth fall into the categories of economic and social rights and the right to development.

Matthew Connelly: *Fatal Misconception. The Struggle to Control World Population*. Cambridge, MA/London 2008.

In an overview of the entire 20th century, Matthew Connelly gives historical depth to what he calls the population control movement. He shows links between eugenicists of the interwar period to the population controllers of the second half of the 20th century. He demonstrates how the Third World became the main target of Western elites concerned with overpopulation. In unsettling detail, he uncovers how the alarmism of the discourse led the leading protagonists of the population control movement to accept the side effects of contraceptives as long as they reached their aims. He concludes that their endeavours – although heavily funded and internationally well connected – did not result in any substantial changes. These changes only occurred after the focus of population control programmes shifted from an exclusive orientation on fertility control to providing more education and job opportunities for women. While human rights narratives do not feature prominently in Connelly's work, he asks why the proclamation of human rights by the population control movement did not lead to a rejection of increasingly coercive policies in India or China. As this article tried to demonstrate, this expectation overlooks the fact that population control advocates associated human rights with social progress rather than with the defence of individual well-being.

Alison Bashford: *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth*. New York 2014. In her detailed study, Alison Bashford argues that population control must not only be associated with biopolitics; it must also be understood in a geopolitical context that includes both global political relations and the relationship between people and space. While she compellingly traces these discourses in an analysis of the intellectual history of the 20th century, her most important contribution is her questioning of the separation between liberalism and population control that is inherent in most historical research. She points to the connection between population control programmes and the ideas of personal freedom and sovereignty that were dominant after the Second World War. Based on the theories of Nikolas Rose, Bashford argues that the population control movement increasingly looked for new ethical and cultural values after 1945. While human rights are not a focus of Bashford's analysis, she showed that population control became entangled with quests for an expansion of better living conditions.

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