



New Delhi, 21 August 2018

To
Shri. J. P. Nadda
Honorable Minister
Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
Government of India, New Delhi

Ongoing debate around Enforcing Two Child Policy in India

Respected Sir

Allow us to draw your kind attention to the ongoing debate around enforcing a two-child policy in India. The issue has yet again gained momentum, following a recent petition signed by 125 Members of Parliament submitted to the Honorable President of India, calling upon the government to implement a stringent two-child policy to control the population growth.

Advocating Reproductive Choices (ARC) is a coalition of 165 civil society organisations and individuals that are committed to advocating for greater attention and focus on sexual and reproductive health issues and family planning services in India. Established in 2005, the coalition aims to expand contraceptive choices and call for greater attention to the quality of care of family planning services for the Indian population. ARC is comprised of organisations that have technical ability and implementation expertise in reproductive health and family planning.

Concerned by the ill-informed debates and discussions on this issue, we at **Advocating Reproductive Choice (ARC) Coalition** submitted an open letter to all the Honourable Members of Parliament, presenting pertinent facts, data and evidences to explain **adverse consequences of disincentives and coercive policies**. Attached is copy of the open letter for your kind reference, which highlights the following points.

- National Family Health Survey 4, 2015-16 (NFHS 4) data indicates 24 states in India have already achieved replacement level fertility and **India's total fertility rate (TFR) of 2.2 is very close to the desired replacement level fertility at 2.1**. This also compares well with the desired number of children by a woman – 1.8 (source). The unmet need for family planning among Indian women is 13%, translating to 30 million women in reproductive age. **A targeted approach to bridge the gap between demand and supply for family planning products and services will indeed be a major boost to fulfilling desired fertility rate in the country.**
- A large cohort of young population coupled with social factors including patriarchal norms contribute to almost 80 percent of our population growth. **Investing in education, behaviour change and changing social norms can be the primary drivers for a healthy and happy population.** States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have experienced significant reduction in fertility rates by focusing on education, women's empowerment and access to quality health care. Experiences from within India and outside demonstrates that disincentives in family planning and coercive population control measures have never worked.
- Women and children have endured the most of regressive policies and social norms – vulnerable people are persecuted, freedom of choice compromised and reproductive rights violated. **Imposing a two-child policy will further deprive the poorest, weakest and the most marginalised, especially women.**



- India is a signatory to the Program of Actions, International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 1994) that underlines the principle of informed free choice for long-term success of family planning. India's own National Population Policy (NPP) has a stated objective to "*address the unmet needs for contraception, health care infrastructure, and health personnel, and to provide integrated service delivery for basic reproductive and child health care*". NPP includes a commitment towards "***voluntary and informed choice and consent of citizens while availing reproductive health care services, and continuation of the target-free approach in administering family planning services***".

You have been a staunch advocate and supporter of progressive, rights based and inclusive policies. You have always ensured that strident and distractive voices to not sway informed pragmatic decisions.

Under your leadership and guidance, Government of India, particularly the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare have made consistent efforts to promote and facilitate improved access to family planning.

Through this letter, we appeal to your good offices to **underline the importance of family planning as the pre-requisites to a healthy and happy population**. Family planning is the most cost effective investment to achieve our sustainable development goals and economic aspirations.

We believe that your words will inspire well-informed demographic discourse in the country and put to rest any arguments for coercive measures to address population issues.

We appeal to you to take necessary action and protect the reproductive rights of the citizens of India.

In Solidarity

On behalf of the ARC Coalition

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