Minute on Population and the Environment (approved February 6, 2000)

The world is experiencing ecological devastation that threatens the survival of all living things: climate change, ozone depletion, the widespread presence of toxic substances in air, water, and soils, and the steady decline of biological diversity. Human population pressures and wasteful levels of consumption are straining the earth’s capacity to sustain a diverse variety of species. The collective actions of humanity are destroying the intricate fabric and marvelous beauty of Creation. As members of the Religious Society of Friends, we are exhorted by our testimonies to live in harmony with one another and with all of nature. We must live sustainably so that human societies, animals, and the natural ecosystems we all inhabit can survive and thrive together. This requires us to live within limits.

We ask ourselves and other Friends how our lifestyles may contribute to ecological crises. Do we distinguish between wants and needs? Do we consider how the testimony of simplicity may contribute both to our living sustainably to our greater spiritual growth? How do we understand the intertwined relationships between our concerns for the environment and issues of social justice and peace? What is our responsibility for reducing excess consumption in the U.S.? How can we increase access to family planning worldwide? What are the implications of our having more children, given U.S. rates of consumption? Can we broaden our understanding of parenting to include care for all children in our communities? How can we bear witness to this emerging set of testimonies? How can Friends’ institutions better reflect our environmental concerns?

Looking beyond our individual consumption choices, how can we work with others to ensure that corporations and governments operate in ways that preserve the environment, both in this country and internationally? What actions can we take to help prevent the environmental devastation that typically occurs when governments, including our own government, engage in warfare and the preparation for war?

We ask our fellow citizens and public officials to acknowledge these environmental crises. We seek their assistance to reach the goal of sustainable living for all species, to restore the earth, and to foster hope for future generations.