

Medical and health advances have cut mortality rates at both ends of life; more babies survive and people live longer. Nearly half the population of the world is under the age of 15. There are now twice as many potential mothers alive as a generation ago. Even with declining fertility rates, world population will continue to climb and not level off until well into the next century at the earliest.

It may not sound serious when we state that world population is growing at an average of 2 per cent a year, but it is the cumulative effect and uneven distribution of this growth that makes it extremely serious. Most of this increase is taking place in the developing world, which already contains two-thirds of humanity. In many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are found millions upon millions of people who exist in poverty-stricken conditions.

Our understanding of the population problem is incomplete if we do not grasp the fact that the one-third of humanity in the developed nations consumes more than 60 per cent of the earth's wealth and resources. A baby born in Canada, where the population problem is not visible, will grow up consuming 50 times the resources and energy that a baby in the heavily populated developing regions will consume. This implies that the developed world is responsible for a much greater per capita environmental impact than the less developed nations, which naturally view this situation as exploitative.

Therefore, the problem in the third world is not population as such. Rather, the problem is extreme poverty perpetuated by the control which the developed world exercises over the bulk of the earth's wealth and resources. In taking for granted ever higher standards of living, which put such strain on the resource and environment capacities of the planet, the minority of rich get richer at the expense of the multiplying poor. The World Population Conference emphasized that large populations are not the cause of underdevelopment but are the result of underdevelopment. The population problem, therefore, concerns not just members but the quality and dignity of all human life.

Family planning programs alone will not solve the problem because, as we have seen, the problem is bigger than the number of births taking place. India and many other developing countries are telling the world that since poverty is the main cause of the massive increase in population, poverty must be eradicated. Then will follow a sharp decline in the rate of population growth. In the development countries, population stability has followed economic development. Family planning, when pushed by the west, can easily be construed by the third world as a device to salve our consciences without adopting structural reforms of world economic and social systems. As so many countries told the World Population Conference that family planning was not a magic panacea, the World Population Plan of Action was rewritten to put a heavy emphasis on "rapid socio-economic development" rather than family planning as the route to population stability.

On economic and social policies, the plan of action states that fertility rates have declined relatively slowly in developing countries partly because of "the inertia of social structures and the insufficiency of economic progress."

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Development efforts should be aided by the entire international community, and "attention must be directed to the just distribution of resources and to the minimization of wasteful aspects of their use throughout the world." Implementation of international strategies "should lead to a reduction in the widening gap in levels of living between developed and developing countries and would be conducive to a reduction in population growth rates particularly in countries where such rates are high."

The plan also proposes "more rational utilization of natural resources, without excess, so that some are not deprived of what others waste." Other recommendations call for high priority efforts to improve food production and develop new food sources, and international co-operation to ensure provision of fertilizers and energy.

The answer, then, to what constitutes a global population policy is indeed an involved one, reflecting the complexity of the problem. The United Nations' answer gives the highest priority to the protection of those already born. Implementing such a global policy—before it is too late—will challenge the ingenuity and moral strength of man as never before. In a world preoccupied with increasing worries about today, it is not easy to mobilize public opinion to support population policies the effects of which can only be seen over very long periods. That is why the attention of the people within developed countries must be immediately obtained, to get on with the job.

Because of our international reputation, technological capacity and wealth, Canada is in a unique position to give the leadership for which mankind is crying out. As Canadians begin to comprehend the full dimensions of the population iceberg, the help of non-governmental organizations will be especially valuable in not only transmitting ideas to the government but in developing public opinion.

Shortly before Bucharest, the Canadian Council on International Co-Operation brought together 280 representatives of 40 major non-governmental organizations who proposed an outline of a national population policy for Canada. The thrust of the recommendations made to the Canadian government was to be responsive to the social and economic needs of the world population in meeting our global responsibilities. The group set down some principles that I consider to be a firm basis on which to build a policy. I shall list just four. First, as a wealthy nation, Canada should set the example in reducing the growth rate of consumption of resources, increase our food production, particularly of plant proteins, and press for the development of fair global distribution systems for food products and natural resources. Second, administer a clearly stated immigration policy fair to all prospective immigrants, and stop promoting the brain drain of developing countries. Third, improve family life education and family planning services while recognizing that the widespread and growing use of abortion is the antithesis of the concept of family planning and reflects a lowering of respect for the value of human life. Fourth, give higher government priority to the social and economic development of the poor countries by more equitable trade, monetary and capital investment arrangements.