

## **PART ONE: BASIC ISSUES AND WORLD REACTIONS**

### **I -- World Population Growth: Facts and Projections**

#### **Global Trends**

The world's population, which was 2.5 billion in 1950, is now about 5.4 billion, and has been growing steadily since 1975 at a rate of 1.7% per year. This rate of increase will probably continue until 1995, after which it is likely to start a very gradual decline. The total world population increase will be near 94 million in 1991, and will rise to a maximum of 98 million per year by about 2000, after which annual increments will slowly start to drop.

These will only be declines in upward trends and do not mean any early halt to overall growth, for today's many children will be the many parents of the next generation. By 2025 the world population will probably have risen to about 8.5 billion, according to the UN "medium variant" projection. Beyond that, estimates understandably become much more tentative. It is generally assumed that some time during the middle of the next century the total fertility rate (the average number of children per woman), now about 3.4, will come down to the replacement level, about 2.1 per woman. If this assumption is not over-optimistic, world population may reach 10 or 11 billion by 2100, and level off at something like 11.5 billion by, say, 2150. But demographers point out the many uncertainties, and also admit that they have been wrong before (the "baby boom" of the 50's was not predicted). Still, at the least, a doubling of population over the next hundred years seems very likely.

#### **Regional Trends**

But growth is already highly uneven. 95% of world population growth is occurring in developing countries, which, on the average, are increasing at 2.1% per year, or 2.3% if China is excluded; the 42 least developed countries are growing at 2.8%. In contrast, the growth rate of developed regions (essentially Europe, North America, Japan and Oceania) has dropped to 0.5% and may fall further. The same stark contrast is naturally to be seen in fertility rates: these average 3.8 in developing countries, or 4.4 if China is excluded, with the least developed among them at more than 6.0; but fertility is now only 1.9, i.e. below the replacement level, in developed countries.