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WORLD POPULATION GROWTH AND POPULATION MOVEMENTS:
POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR CANADA

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Major decisions are facing Canada's policy-makers on the two great "people" phenomena of our time, rapid world population growth and mass movements of population. A huge UN Conference on Population and Development, almost on the scale of UNCED, is barely two years away, and because population issues are controversial as well as important, its preparation will require prolonged high-level attention. Migration issues have recently become a matter of widespread public concern in Canada, and are now high on the foreign policy agenda of many countries; they will also figure in the Conference. We urgently need a better understanding of these fundamental but complex problems, their links with other global issues, their impact on Canada, and what we can and should do about them. The paper is designed to help in this task.

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The statistics are frightening. World population has reached 5.4 billion and is increasing at 1.7% per year; it will reach 8.5 billion by 2025, and probably at least double by the end of the century. 95% of population growth is in developing countries, with the highest rates in Africa; in contrast all industrialised countries are now growing slowly if at all. Eventually world population will stabilise, but the experts cannot answer the key question on which so much depends: how soon, and at what level?

Rapid population growth combined with poverty cripples economic development; environmental sustainability is menaced; political and social structures are corroded, and authoritarian reaction against feared unrest blocks progress in human rights. In turn, migration pressures are fuelled, and world economic imbalances and Third World indebtedness are increased. Internationally, coming shifts in world population ratios will menace the UN system. How will the present three economic colossi, with their eventually declining populations, cope with the demographic colossi of tomorrow?

Economic progress and family planning complement each other in contributing to fertility decline, even though the process is gradual and uneven. Important factors include broader access to education, and particularly advancement of the status of women. Contraceptive use must increase rapidly if population is not to grow even faster than predicted; there is already much unmet demand. Surprisingly, neither AIDS, malnutrition nor religious factors will have decisive statistical effects. Most developing countries now have population policies, but in many the essential political will is still lacking.

Developed countries now recognise the link between population growth and development, but do not stress it; the link with the environment is more tentatively acknowledged; the link with migratory movements is only beginning to be seriously discussed. Population issues have not been taken up in summit gatherings. However there

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