

already in excess of 3.9 billion and growing at a rate of nearly 2 per cent a year, will reach at least 6.5 billion by the year 2,000. In addition, we face the prospect of large increases in the concentration of people in huge urban centres. Yet the more fundamental problem is that population growth is greatest in those areas least able to sustain it and at the same time to achieve and maintain an acceptable standard of living for all. There is no question that efforts must be intensified to improve living standards in these areas. And it is inevitable that such improvements will lead to higher global rates of consumption. Therefore all of us must consider the double impact of population growth and increased consumption in two ways - *first* in relation to the finite natural resources of the planet and *second* in relation to existing distribution patterns both within and among nations.

Canadian interests

Canada shares the concern about these sobering trends and prospects. Our approach is coloured by our own experience. Although we are a relatively young nation, we have experienced our own demographic evolution. Rapid population growth was once an important factor in opening our frontiers and making Canada a viable political entity. Rural and frontier life fostered pro-natalist attitudes. Subsequent development of a modern economy was accompanied by a rapid decline in natural population increase, and today an important part of our population-growth is accounted for by immigration. This is another major aspect of our population picture. Canada has been largely settled from outside, a process which has resulted in a diversity of ethnic backgrounds, and a variety of interests and goals.

Viewed from outside, Canada may present a picture of infinite possibilities, of open spaces and rich natural resources. Yet these attributes must be seen in the context of a number of factors. Politically, Canada has a federal constitution that divides responsibility for many economic and social policy questions between federal and provincial governments. Geographically, economic and population growth has been influenced by harsh climatic factors. Less than 17 per cent of Canada's land-space is arable, and the proportion devoted to agriculture is diminishing under the pressures of urbanization. Patterns of settlement have resulted in concentration of our population in a thin strip of land in the southern reaches of the country. Today some 90 per cent of Canada's population inhabits 7 per cent of the land. As a result, in the urban areas we are searching for measures to ameliorate the consequences of urban concentration.