



# Statements and Speeches

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## GLOBAL POPULATION PROBLEMS

A Statement by the Honourable Jeanne Sauv , Minister of the Environment, to the World Population Conference, Bucharest, [August 20, 1974].

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We are meeting at a time when we are increasingly conscious that mankind is having only limited success in managing the global forces that influence its very survival. The continued existence of the human species has always depended on its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Indeed, in this interdependent world the price of not adapting is becoming increasingly dear.

The global problems of food shortage and drought, inflation and disarray in the international monetary system, widespread poverty and intensified pressures on a finite environment seem to have out-paced man's capacity to find solutions. We are here in Bucharest as part of a larger effort to confront these issues. This effort has included the International Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, and the special session of the General Assembly last April. It includes the Law of the Sea Conference in Caracas and the forthcoming Conference on Food and Human Settlements.

Just as the population question cannot and must not be seen in isolation from related questions of development, food and resources, so this World Population Conference must assume the character of the broadest kind of political conference, one that complements parallel efforts in other fields, and whose main concern is improvement of the welfare of mankind.

Our subject is people - not simply their global numbers but, more important, the quality of their lives. The fact that this conference is being held confirms the deep concern of the international community with these dimensions of mankind's problems and with the fact that they have not previously been dealt with at the international political level. A political conference on population was unthinkable ten years ago. Yet hard realities on population trends and prospects have now made political action an imperative.

### Population trends

The most striking aspect of these trends is that world population,

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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.

The importance of these factors is reflected in a number of studies in which the Canadian Government is at present engaged. Influences on movements of population within Canada, particularly to major urban areas, are being examined. We are endeavouring to understand better the consequences of urban concentration and are searching for ways to improve the quality of urban life. An attempt is being made to balance conflicting demands for rural and urban land-uses. And we are assessing the characteristics and consequences of immigration. Canada also realizes the basic importance of rational policies at national levels as building-blocks to any global response to population trends. Our experience has made us aware of the diversity of population problems to be faced. We realize there are no simple answers and that these problems are closely related to broader economic and social forces.

Canada's preparations for this conference reflect the growing appreciation by Canadians of the complexity of population issues. Our perspectives are also based on a number of preparatory activities. These include public seminars and discussions in our universities and in other public forums. They include a series of public consultations initiated by the Federal Government that stimulated a wide range of thoughtful and concerned opinions. These are complemented by consultations between federal and provincial authorities that established new levels of awareness of the need for a comprehensive approach to population issues in Canada.

Today we approach this meeting acutely mindful that, in a brief two-week period, this conference must deal with some very fundamental questions about relations between population and development, natural resources, the environment and the family. It is our hope that this exercise will lead to improved understanding of these questions and ultimately to the identification of effective national policies.

#### Canadian position

Canada considers that certain aspects of the issues on the agenda before us are of primary importance. We consider population factors to be closely related to other aspects of the development process, and we recognize that measures both to influence and contend with population trends include structural and institutional change.

Our program of international development assistance in the population field has been channelled almost exclusively through multilateral agencies. While we have not been active bilaterally, we are now

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prepared to discuss with interested parties the possibility of increased activity in this area.

Canada recognizes that there are limits - to the rate at which the earth's resources can be exploited, to the capacity of the biosphere to absorb pollution, and to global capacity to support human life. We recognize the need for a greater sense of responsibility to conserve our global resources. We consider, therefore, that countries, particularly developed countries, should examine their production and consumption activities with a view to promoting more efficient patterns of utilization. Furthermore, we consider that genuine co-operation is needed to attempt to remove the institutional political and socio-economic barriers to the better development of each country's human and natural resources.

Canada also recognizes the importance of the promotion of individual human rights in the formulation of population policies, and particularly the preservation of individual freedom of choice in fertility matters. We consider that special emphasis should be placed on efforts to enhance the status of women, both as a desirable end in itself and also as a prominent factor related to population trends and development.

These and many other factors have been well reflected in the Draft World Population Plan of Action to be adopted by this conference. My Government has reviewed this document carefully and, on the whole, considers it a well-reasoned, balanced expression of the diverse facets of population problems and alternatives to deal with them. We shall work for the adoption of this document as a vehicle for enhanced national and international action on population matters. We consider that international institutions, particularly those of the UN system, can play a more effective role in assisting developing countries to deal with population, and we are prepared to assume our share of the responsibility for meeting increased future needs.

### Conclusion

The agenda we have before us presents a challenge both to sovereign governments to define national population policies and to the international community to co-operate more effectively in dealing with the global forces that are shaping man's destiny. We know that population is a crucial factor in our planet's future. And we are beginning to perceive more clearly both the dimensions and the means each sovereign state can use to shape that future.

Canada is here to listen and to learn. We hope debate at this con-

ference will sharpen our understanding of the options open to us, and that it will help us in shaping our own policies the form of which is not yet fully defined.

A crucial factor in the success of this conference will lie in follow-up activities. It is not enough that we describe our population trends and prospects. We must sharpen our tools to estimate their consequences in a world of growing scarcities. And we must work towards more effective institutions and arrangements to meet basic human needs. The consequences of our failure to do so are becoming increasingly severe in an interdependent planet where the balance between growing human needs and the means of meeting them becomes a more distant goal every day.

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