

## UNITED NATIONS WORLD POPULATION YEAR, 1974

I wish to begin by thanking Father Springer for giving me this opportunity to participate in the discussions about "Theology and the United Nations World Population Year." I am not entirely familiar with the evolution of thinking among theologians with respect to the population matter but through my rather long experience in this field, especially in Latin America, I am, of course, aware that Catholic views carry much weight in the decision-making process at the highest government levels regarding what to do or not to do in connection with population matters. Therefore, we in the United Nations have looked with enormous interest to the fact that this Society has decided to put population as a subject for discussion in its agenda this year. But quite frankly, we are not surprised at the decision because it seems only natural that theologians, being aware of the very important demographic changes which have occurred in the world in recent decades, would wish to reflect most carefully about possible corresponding changes in our thinking and actions in relation to population.

In the United Nations we work under the guidance of the member governments; this guidance is expressed, in the case of population, through the deliberations in the Population Commission, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations. It is fair to say that the issue of population, as a subject of international concern, has been more seriously and heatedly debated over the last fifteen years by government representatives in the United Nations than in perhaps any other international or national forum. During this period, there has been a persistent divergence of views on the significance of population growth for development. Such diversity of views stems from demographic situations which are actually quite different in the various countries—some are obviously feeling the pressure of population while in others there are apparently ample resources in relation to the existing population; in some countries the rate of population growth is low in relation to what the respective governments would like it to be; while in others the governments consider that the population is increasing much too rapidly. Disparities stem also from rather funda-

mental differences in styles of development which the governments see as the most effective ones for their own countries. The reasons, therefore, for the diversity of positions with respect to population are valid ones and we in the United Nations must respect them.

The traditional United Nations role in the field of population has been the collection, analysis and assessment of world statistics on population projections and trends. These data have been made available to the public on a world-wide basis since 1948 in the United Nations' *Demographic Yearbook*, as well as through a wide variety of analytical studies published over the years. One of the most recent of these, which summarizes some of the latest findings on the world population situation, is a paper entitled "Demographic Trends in the World and Its Major Regions, 1950-1970," published on 3 May 1973 as United Nations document number E/CONF.60/BP/1, which focuses attention on the most important trends observed in that period.

I should like to draw your attention to the most relevant demographic facts mentioned in that publication because they illustrate the reasons behind the widespread concern with the population prospects of the world.

There is, to begin with, wide recognition that the demographic situation has changed drastically during the last few decades. Let us briefly review the changes between 1950 and 1970:

— The total population in millions changed as follows:

	1950	1970	Increase
World total	2,486	3,635	1,150
More developed regions	856	1,091	233
Less developed regions	1,628	2,545	917
Urban	703	1,358	655
Rural	1,783	2,277	494

— Birth rates (per 1000 population):

	1950-55	1965-70	Change
World total	36.7	33.8	-2.9
More developed regions	22.9	18.6	-4.3
Less developed regions	43.9	40.6	-3.3

## -Death rates (per 1000 population):

	1950-55	1965-70	Change
World total	19.3	14.0	-5.3
More developed regions	10.2	9.1	-1.1
Less developed regions	24.0	16.1	-7.9

## - Rates of natural increase (per 100 population):

	1950-55	1965-79	Change
World total	1.7	2.0	+0.3
More developed regions	1.3	1.0	-0.3
Less developed regions	2.0	2.5	+0.5

It can easily be seen, then, that because of an important reduction in death rates and the maintenance of fairly stable fertility levels, the rate of population growth increased from 2.0 to 2.5 per cent between the early fifties and late sixties in the developing countries, which comprised in 1970 more than two-thirds of the world's population. The figures I have just quoted hide very important variations, however, such as the high mortality rates—infant mortality rates, in particular—still prevailing in a number of developing countries, and the reduction of fertility rates which has been observed in such large countries as China, Korea and the Philippines, as well as in smaller countries such as Barbados, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica.

If we project observed trends into the future, taking as a basis reasonable assumptions with respect to expectations for mortality and fertility trends, but also taking into account the demographic momentum implicit in the present age distribution of the world's population—since there is, as you know, a large proportion of people under the age of fifteen in the developing countries—the United Nations estimates show that the total population of the world may reach 6.5 billion by the end of the century.

If one assumes that in each major region of the world, fertility and mortality will tend to cancel each other out, but that this process of stabilization will take place only gradually, estimates made by the Population Division of the United Nations indicate that world population may not reach stabilization until about the year 2125, and that, by

that time, under even the most optimistic assumptions with respect to rapid reduction of fertility, total world population will have increased to about 10 billion people.

Concurrently with the acceleration of population growth there has been a shifting of population from rural to urban areas and in particular to the principal cities in the developing countries. It is expected that such a trend will continue and perhaps at a more rapid pace than in the past. The Population Division estimates that the 162 cities which had more than 1 million inhabitants with a total population of 416 million in 1970 will increase to perhaps 273 cities by 1985 with a total population of 805 million, and that of these there will be perhaps 17 with more than 10 million people. In about twelve years there may be 147 cities of more than one million inhabitants in the developing countries of the world.

There seems to be a wide area of consensus among scholars and government representatives from countries where widely different demographic conditions and ideological positions prevail in recognizing that the process of modernization as reflected mainly in a change of the pattern of living from rural to urban life has led in the now developed countries to a reduction in the size of the families and to the establishment of the small family as the standard of modern life.

Changes in fertility in developed countries have been evidently influenced by such factors as the diminishing importance of children for the family economy, the prohibition of child labor, the adoption of compulsory education for children, the increasing opportunities for women to participate in economic activities, and the change in the mode of production from artisan to industry.

The drop in mortality, perhaps the most significant demographic change in the last thirty years in developing countries, can be associated fairly closely to crucial discoveries in medical science and perhaps more directly to the application of such discoveries through public health measures made possible by the improvement of economic conditions and a rising concern for the health of the population. Subsequently, the improvement in the expectancy of life of the population and in particular the increasing probability of surviving through early infancy undoubtedly led to declines in fertility and contributed as well to change the life cycle of families since now, for example, people can

expect to see their sons and grandsons reaching adult age in much larger proportions than before, and on a wider scale the reduction in mortality in the forties has certainly led in many developing countries to swelling cohorts of young adults to enter the labor market in the sixties and to cause a visible impact on the demand for admissions in higher learning institutions.

This process of transition which seems to have been clearly established in such countries as the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and others, is also beginning to emerge in countries now going through a process of development. For example, in my own country, Chile, at the time that the process of industrialization and urbanization took momentum in the fifties and sixties, an appreciable increase in the number of illegal abortions was detected, a fact which led the authorities to initiate, first on an experimental basis, a program of family planning which later was incorporated as a regular activity of the health services.

It is reasonable to expect that the developing countries will follow the same evolution. However, the circumstances are now different and the question which is now seriously debated in the United Nations as well as in many circles is whether something should be done to influence demographic changes, i.e. whether some population policies should be adopted to either modify the rate of growth of the population, change the geographic distribution, stimulate or deter urbanization, to attempt to achieve a certain system of human settlement which would be the most favorable under the circumstances, in brief, whether population policies should be adopted.

Recognizing the important implications of the population changes mentioned before, we have been requested by the Economic and Social Council to assemble information on measures and/or policies adopted or being adopted by countries throughout the world in order to influence or effect changes in demographic trends and to provide assistance to governments in studying the implications of population trends in formulating policies. After a few years of working in this area, it became evident that, in addition to the need to assist governments in formulating their own policies, there was also a need to formulate an international policy in the population field, and that the subject was of such importance that it would require the convening of a World Popula-

tion Conference.

In view of this trend of events, the Economic and Social Council decided in 1970 to request the Secretary-General of the United Nations to organize a World Population Conference, and arrangements are now well underway for such a Conference to be convened in Bucharest, Romania, in August, 1974. The Economic and Social Council adopted two basic resolutions having to do with the Conference: resolution 1484 (XLVIII) and resolution 1672 (LII). The operational paragraph of the first of these reads: "Decides that the Conference shall be devoted to consideration of basic demographic problems, their relationship with economic and social development, and population policies and action programmes needed to promote human welfare and development."

In view of the projection and sensitivity of the discussion of population as a subject of policy, it has been decided that the World Population Conference be organized under the direct guidance of the governments and the Population Commission was designated as the inter-governmental body to provide such guidance. But it was also decided that efforts should be made to seek the views of all the governments of the world through all possible channels such as the regional commissions and the international associations of professionals, and research institutions. To assume the responsibility for the Conference and that part of the World Population Year that relates directly to the Conference, the Secretary-General of the United Nations appointed Mr. Antonio Carillo-Flores as Secretary-General of the Conference. The responsibility for the preparation of the substantive papers for the Conference has been delegated by the Secretary-General of the Conference to the United Nations Population Division, the Director of which is Mr. Léon Tabah.

The Conference, which will conduct a global review of major population trends and prospects up to the year 2000 and beyond; it will consider the implications of population changes and prospects for those areas which are of major international concern at the present time: development, the environment, and family well-being, being understood that, under the heading of development, such critical aspects as poverty, the growing gaps in income both among and within countries, the modernization of means of production, the growing unemployment in developing countries, will be discussed and analyzed, in order to

determine to what extent population factors have a bearing on such matters.

The main contribution expected from the World Population Conference is the preparation of a World Population Plan of Action, the nature of which is yet to be determined, but which must be the expression of an international policy for population. It may take the form of a general international strategy similar in some ways to the strategy for the Second Development Decade; indeed, there may be many points in common, since action for population cannot be conceived of as being isolated from the total development effort, but it may include as well an Action Plan to be implemented by appropriate international bodies with adequate financing to support a series of activities of regional or world-wide interest. Whether a strategy, a plan, or both, are adopted, they must respect certain human rights which, accepted as international principles, may be recommended by the World Population Conference for adoption by appropriate international bodies.

It can be seen that an important objective of the Conference is also to provide countries with a basis for reviewing their situation in the light of considerations regarding world-wide problems and the implications of population trends for the future of mankind, without prejudice to the principle of national sovereignty in this matter; the Conference will provide countries with the opportunity for an open exchange of views on this delicately-balanced question, and, one may hope, for achieving a better and more vital mutual understanding, on the international level, of questions which are of vital concern to us all.

If it were adopted, as a major purpose of the international population policy to achieve stabilization of world population in the shortest period of time—a matter which has been mentioned on many occasions—a number of questions would arise about the necessary strategy which must be considered very carefully. For example: (a) Since the principle of national sovereignty is an essential aspect of the matter, and two-thirds of the world population is now living in the developing countries which have the highest rate of growth, should the governments of the developing countries not have an overriding role in the formulation of the international population policy? (b) Since the available technology for contraception has widely varying degrees of effectiveness and acceptability, what principles should be respected in the

adoption of such technologies?

It is in this context that I feel it is of extreme interest that the Catholic Theological Society has taken the decision to discuss population today.

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I should now like to turn very briefly to the World Population Year, although this is a very important aspect of the international action in the population field.

This is a program requested by the General Assembly as a means of inviting the attention of all nations to the population trends, prospects and problems originated by such trends. The responsibility for organizing such a program has been entrusted by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to Mr. Rafael M. Salas, the Executive Director for the United Nations Fund for Population Activities.

For the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), which is the main source of population assistance to developing countries through the United Nations and its related agencies and organizations, this means primarily an expansion of communications and information-type projects to open channels for interchanges of knowledge and experience on a vast range of population matters stretching from demography and population policies to education, training and family planning. As in its normal programs, however, UNFPA remains strictly objective, advocates no specific policies or directions and administers assistance totally in accordance with the wishes of requesting governments. Moreover, in regard to family planning, UNFPA adheres closely to General Assembly resolution 2211 (XXI) which, *inter alia*, recognizes the sovereignty of nations in formulating and promoting their population policies with due regard to the principle that the size of the family should be the free choice of each individual family, and requests the Secretary-General to pursue, within the limits of available resources, the implementation of a work program covering training, research, information and advisory services in the field of population.

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