

Forum: The Third Committee
Topic: The Issue of Increasing World Population
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Position: Chair of the Third Committee

Description of the problem:

The world population currently stands at approximately 7.2 billion people and, according to the United Nations' World Population Prospects report, is growing by 74 million people per year. Such a rapid increase is predicted to result in the world population reaching 9 billion by 2050 and 10 billion by 2083, assuming a decrease in average fertility rate from 2.5 to 2.

The areas with most profound increases are undoubtedly those in the developing world, as such nations account for an estimated 97% of world population growth. This is because the conquest of disease, improved public health and a more efficient food production and distribution network have significantly decreased infant mortality rates

worldwide. Furthermore the economic vulnerability of such areas often results in a lack of modern family planning or use of effective contraception leading to a higher birth rate.

Africa: By far, the largest regional percentage increase in population by 2050 will be in Africa, whose population can be expected to at least double from 1.1 billion to about 2.3 billion. That projection, however, depends on the assumption that sub-Saharan Africa's total fertility rate (TFR, the average number of children per woman) will decline from 5.1 to approximately 3.0 by 2050. That decline, in turn, assumes that the use of family planning in the region will rise significantly. But recent surveys from many sub-Saharan African countries have indicated that TFR decline is either slower than projected or is not taking place at all. Only 20% of married women in sub-Saharan Africa use a modern form of family planning, the lowest rate in the world.

Asia: With a current population of 4.3 billion, Asia will likely experience a much smaller proportional increase than Africa but will still add approximately 1 billion people by 2050.

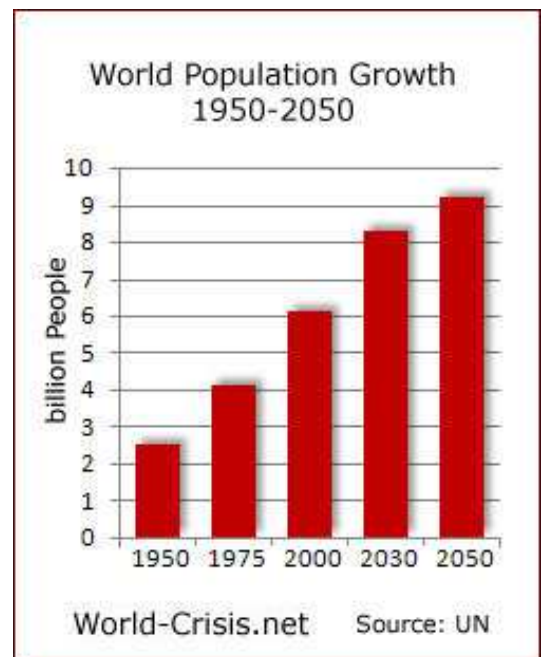


Figure 1

Much of Asia's future population growth will be determined by what happens in China and India, two countries that account for about 60% of the region's population. In India, the largest unknowns are future fertility trends in the heavily populated northern states where TFRs of about 3.5 are well above those of India's southern states. Asia's TFR is 2.2. Excluding China, 47% of women in Asia use a modern form of contraception. Within Asia, several of the more economically advanced countries such as Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan have TFRs of 1.4 or even lower.

Latin America: Latin America and the Caribbean is the developing region with the smallest proportional growth expected by 2050, from 599 million to 740 million, largely due to fertility declines in several of its largest countries such as Brazil and Mexico. The region's TFR is currently about 2.2 children per woman, and the use of modern contraception stands at 67%.

By contrast to such trends of increasing TRFs, a sharp decline in fertility rates in the developing world, partly due to increased family planning and the impact of the recession means that TRFs are forecast to stay at approximately 2.0 and therefore balance the death rate in Europe. However the USA is currently experiencing a particularly low TFR of 1.9, leading to an overall decline. Having said this it must be noted that this is set to be offset by increased net immigration.

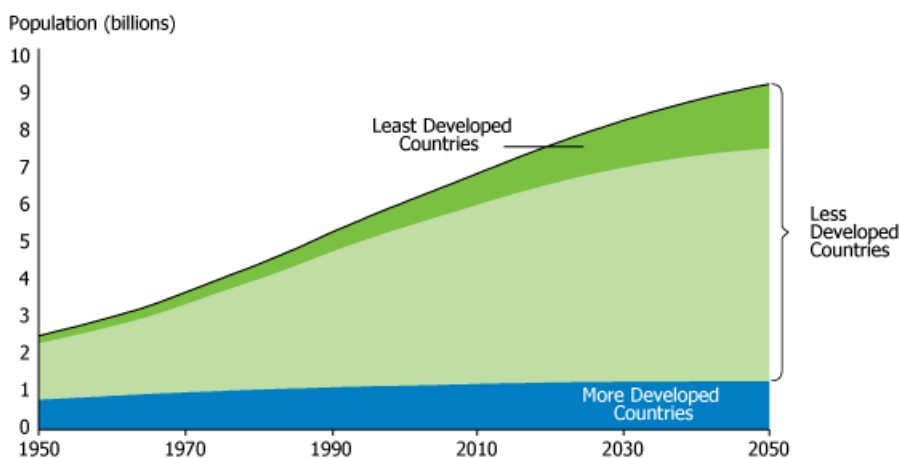


Figure 2

The radically different demographic situation between developed and developing countries, as illustrated by figure 2 shows the "demographic divide". This is the vast gulf in birth and death rates among the world's countries. On one side of this divide are mostly poor countries with relatively high birth rates and low

life expectancies. On the other side are mostly wealthy countries with birth rates so low that population decline is all but guaranteed (yet will undoubtedly be somewhat countered by immigration) and where average life expectancy extends past age 75, creating rapidly aging populations. Such a sharp demand exacerbates the gap between the wealthy and the poor, and complicates access to Earth's finite resources.

Although these trends, especially those in developing nations of increased life expectancy and reduced infant mortality, are often celebrated as a 'triumph of humanity', the increased

strain on the world's limited resources extenuates the lingering environmental, social and economic problems. The following issues in particular are worsened by this continuing, rapid expansion of the human footprint:

Poverty:

Despite the ever increasing population, the number of people living under the international poverty line of \$1.25 per day declined from 1.8 billion to 1.4 billion between 1990 and 2005 and the proportion of people living in extreme poverty in developing regions is 27%, down from 46%. One explanation for this may be that the increase in people available to work could stimulate economic growth. However, it is more likely that savings which could be invested in infrastructure and economic development are often used to meet the immediate demands for food and vital resources required by a young population. It must also be taken into consideration that as the population of developing countries increases radically or fluctuates, as has been the case in recent years, it becomes difficult to sustain the wellbeing of such



Figure 3

large numbers of people on a stable market, this can be seen by the fact that over 1 billion people in the world today do not have adequate food and water provisions to maintain a healthy lifestyle and thus 25,000 people die of malnutrition each day. Furthermore, as overpopulation results in reduced standards of living and insufficient housing, the spread of diseases such as cholera increased and further reduces the standards of living for thousands of people. In order to combat this issue, the UN Millennium Development Goals were set up, which aims to combat the issue of poverty by 2015, however the impact of this measure is questionable due to the ambitious aims of the resolution and a lack of enthusiastic financial support.

Environmental Issues:

One of the main consequences of overpopulation, in both MEDCs and LEDCs is the problem of urban sprawl, which has led to the majority of the world's population living in cities, in areas which are often dangerous. This issue was illustrated by the Japan Tsunami in 2012 when hundreds of people were injured despite the area being scarcely populated 100 years ago.

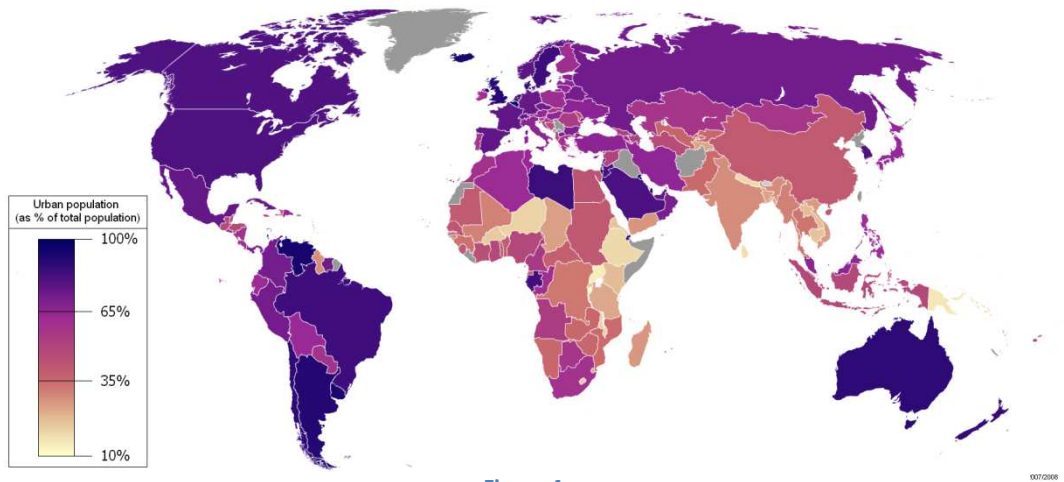


Figure 4

Another major environmental issue resulting from overpopulation is the strain on the earth's limited resources. It is estimated that, due to over consumption, the world's oil supply will dwindle by as soon as 2020. As our population and our needs for energy rise, we try to exploit ever more difficult sources of energy. At least half of the cause of the oil-spill disaster in the Gulf of Mexico oil spill in 2020 was the unprecedented rise in population. If there were only 150 million people in the USA, the need to drill wells one mile deep in the ocean before having developed safe technologies to do so would not exist.

Furthermore, the rising population also extenuates the pre-existing problems caused by inefficient energy use such as the issue of greenhouse gas levels and climate change. With more people on the planet, more forestry and habitat is being destroyed with 2.2 million acres of farmland and forestry destroyed every year in the USA alone to provide more materials for an increasing population, as well as creating suitable land for housing.

Social Issues:

Many social issues arise from the problem of overcrowding, such as the preservation of human rights and personal freedom, which becomes more difficult. Additionally, in an overpopulated area it becomes more difficult to maintain peace as the need for resources becomes more prominent. For example a source of resource conflict is the Jordan River, which passes through Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and Israel. Researchers report that most of the 37 actual military conflicts over water since 1950 took place between Israel and its Arab neighbours over the Jordan River and its tributaries, which supply millions of people with water for drinking, bathing, and farming. These are desert regions and the limits on water should guide the population policies of the nations involved.

Background Information:

The issue of increasing world population has always been both a problem and a triumph for the international community, since the population reached 5 billion in 1987. However the main international agreement on population and development is the Programme of

Action, the final document of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) which came into force in 1994. The Programme of Action, the consensus of 179 countries at ICPD, says that countries have the right to make their own population policies; and that men and women equally have the right to make their own decisions on family size. Coercion of any kind has no part to play. This also contributed to the Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality is one of the Goals. Education and health care, including reproductive health and rights, are also part of the Goals.

On the tenth anniversary of the Millennium Summit, Secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, along with the private sector, foundations, international organizations, civil society and research organizations, kicked off a major concerted worldwide effort to accelerate progress on women's and children's health.

There have already been many successes such as death in childbirth is down by 40% since 1990. Nearly two-thirds of women have access to modern family planning, but the goal of universal reproductive health care coverage is far off, especially in LEDCs. Most of the gains are concentrated in 12 big emerging and developing countries. For poor women in most developing countries, nothing has changed. An estimated 200 million women would use family planning today if they could, but they don't have the option. This, no doubt, contributes to the increasing world population and the social, environmental and humanitarian issues related to the issue.

Historical Perspective:

The technological advances and changes in rural to urban migration of the industrial revolution was a major milestone in the growth of the human population. After the start of the Industrial Revolution, during the 18th century, the rate of population growth began to increase. This is due to the improved standards of medicine and increased economic activity. By the end of the century, the world's population was estimated at just less than 1 billion. At the turn of the 20th century, the world's population was roughly 1.6 billion. By 1940, this figure had increased to 2.3 billion.

Other historical milestones which have impacted on the world's population include the discovery of antibiotics in 1940s which has saved millions of lives, and the introduction of birth control pills in the 1960s, marking the beginning of modern family planning.

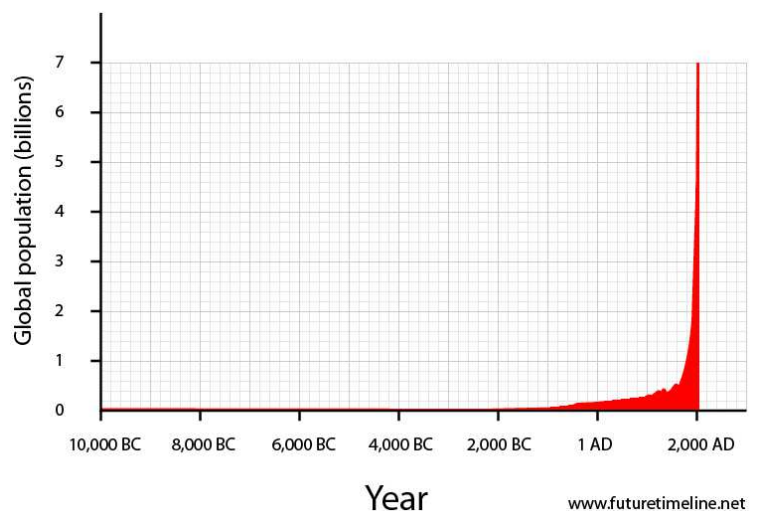


Figure 5

Timeline of Key Events:

- 1974, The UN population fund was established in order to play a leading role within the United Nations and combat the issues associated with overpopulation.
- 1987 (11th July), the world population reached the 5 billion mark. In order to commemorate this milestone world population day is observed annually.
- 1994, International conference on population and development in Cairo, the result of which is often referred to as the IPCD.
- 1999 (12th October), World Population reaches 6 billion
- 2000, Millennium Summit which introduced the Millennium Development goals.
- 2005, World Summit.

Relevant Resolutions:

- IPCD, 1994
- Millennium Development Goals, 2000

Also refer to:

- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- United Nations Population Division
- UN Commission on Population and Development
- UN General Assembly's 1999 Special Session on Population and Development (ICPD+5)
- Healthy Expectations: Celebrating Achievements of the Cairo Consensus and Highlighting the Urgency for Action (Booklet issued in commemoration of the first 15 years of the 20-year Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development)
- UNFPA, State of the World Population 2009
- UN Statistics Division, Demographic and Social Statistics
- UN World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision
- Population Ageing and Development
- Population Challenges and Development Goals
- World Population Ageing: 1950-2050
- Population Newsletter (June 2009 and previous editions)
- The United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN)

How to prepare:

- When writing position papers and resolutions, remember that an increasing world population can be viewed in a positive light from a humanitarian standpoint.
- Thoroughly research the situation in the nation you are representing. Remember to consider its economic status, problem of poverty and availability of resources.
- Think about the protection of rights, particularly those of women. For example the issue of increasing world population and poverty could be improved by allowing access to modern contraceptives. Would the government of your country be in a moral position to provide access to such resources to its citizens?
- Research the Millennium Development goals and consider the impact they have had on your country either through financial donation or receiving support.

Some Helpful Links:

<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/population/index.shtml>

<http://www.who.int/en/>

<http://populationproblem.org/>

<http://www.globalissues.org/issue/198/human-population>

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

http://www.worldof7billion.org/wall_chart

Sources of pictures and graphics:

- 1) www.world-crisis.net
- 2) www.googleimages.com
- 3) www.guttmacher.org
- 4) http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Urban_population_in_2005_world_map.PNG
- 5) <http://www.futuretimeline.net/21stcentury/2011.htm>

Sources:

<http://www.globalissues.org/issue/198/human-population>

<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/population/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Projections_of_population_growth

<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

<http://esa.un.org/wpp/>

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1998/7/98.07.02.x.html>

<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/population/index.shtml>

<http://www.prb.org/Publications/Datasheets/2012/world-population-data-sheet/fact-sheet-world-population.aspx>

http://www.howmany.org/big_picture.php

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

http://www.worldof7billion.org/wall_chart

http://www.who.int/gho/urban_health/situation_trends/urban_population_growth_text/en/

http://howmany.org/environmental_and_social_ills.php

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_overpopulation#History_of_population_growth

<http://www.ecology.com/2011/09/18/ecological-impact-industrial-revolution/>

