

**STATEMENT TO THE COMMISSION ON  
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
(Thirty-seventh session)**

By

**Joseph Chamie**  
Director  
Population Division  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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**UNITED NATIONS**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ocampo, Ms. Obaid, Mr. Chowdhury, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its establishment in 1946, this Commission has been concerned with one of the defining features of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the unprecedented growth of world population. This growth has significantly affected the course of life and the environment on this planet. Consider, for example, that at the time of the Commission's first session the total population of the world was 2.3 billion people. Today this figure amounts to the combined populations of two countries: China and India.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century ushered in the world's most rapid rates of population growth. World population nearly quadrupled during the past century, with most of this growth – 80 per cent- taking place during the tenure of this Commission. Moreover, the 20<sup>th</sup> century ushered in revolutionary changes in life expectancy, child bearing, the family, ageing and migration.

Inspired and guided by this Commission, the United Nations responded to these challenges in a variety of ways. Most notable perhaps, the United Nations convened five global population conferences over the past five decades. As early as 1954, the United Nations organized in Rome the first global conference dealing with population and development issues. At this scientific gathering, the opening statement of Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld included the following remark: "Thus, the situation in which we find ourselves constitutes one of the greatest challenges that has ever faced the world."

A decade later, the United Nations convened a second scientific population conference in Belgrade. As in the Rome Conference, the concerns of the 1965 Belgrade conference were focused on improving the lives and welfare of men, women and children, especially in the less developed regions. The representative of Secretary-General U Thant remarked in his opening statement to the conference: "If we are not to fall hopelessly beh

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implementation of the Programme of Action. In doing so, it is also considering what should be the next steps in effectively addressing the wide spectrum of population and development issues facing the international community of nations.

Today the population of the world is 6.4 billion. This figure is 4 billion people more than the population of the world at the time of the Commission's first session.

What about the future? What kind of future will the new century bring? By definition, the future is unknown. However, certain population outcomes are highly likely, or at least more likely than others. According to United Nations projections, the major features of future world population, at least by mid-century, may be summarized by ten major trends.

**First, world population will be larger.** At least 2 billion additional inhabitants, and perhaps closer to 3 billion more people are expected to be added to the world over the next five decades. According to the medium variant projection, world population will reach nearly 9 billion by mid-century. This projected increase of nearly 3 billion people by 2050 is the second highest half-century increase in recorded human history. The record-setting 3.5 billion was added to the world between 1950 and 2000.

**Second, world population growth will be slower.** In terms of absolute growth, the peak of about 87 million occurred in the late 1980s. The current annual increase of world population is about 77 million. By mid-century the world is expected to be adding 29 million annually, or about a third of today's increase.

**Third, more of the world's population will be concentrated in less developed countries.** By 2050, nearly 90 per cent of world population is expected to be living in less developed nations versus 80 per cent today. This is due to the fact that about 95 per cent of the world's future population growth will be taking place in the less developed regions. Today, for example, six countries account for half of the world's annual growth: India, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Indonesia.

**Fourth, fertility levels will be lower and family sizes smaller.** Fertility levels have come down markedly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in virtually every region of the world. For example, whereas in the 1950s women in the less developed regions were having an average of six children, today they are having three children on average. By mid-century, the global fertility average is anticipated to be close to replacement levels of around two children per couple. Currently, 61 countries

**Sixth, life expectancy will be higher in most countries.** With modern medicines, changes in life styles and improved nutrition, lower mortality rates are foreseen, with longer life than currently imagined. By mid-century, global life expectancy is projected to be about 10 years more than today, i.e., reaching 76 years, and the number of people aged 100 years or older will likely be in excess of 3 million, which is a twenty-fold increase over the number today.

**Seventh, the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is expected to worsen in certain regions.** At least for the next

Mr. Chairman,

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a century of profound and unprecedented population growth and change. The challenges of the past were faced squarely and early on by the distinguished members of this Commission. Among other things, this Commission initiated the convening of a series of five crucial population conferences that adopted principles, plans and programmes to address critical population issues of today and tomorrow.

As has been the case in the past, this Commission has a vital role to play in the international debate on population and development. The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council as well as other United Nations bodies will continue to turn to this Commission for explanation and guidance concerning population and development issues. Bold vision and strong leadership from the distinguished members of this Commission, coupled with international cooperation and commitment, will greatly enhance the ability of the United Nations to contribute to making the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a much better place for the generations of today as well as tomorrow.

Thank you very much.

**UNITED NATIONS LONG-RANGE WORLD POPULATION PROJECTIONS**  
(in billions)

<i>Based on Revision of</i>	<i>Issued in</i>	<i>Medium Variant Stabilization (year)</i>	<i>High Variant (year)</i>	<i>Low Variant (year)</i>
1968 .....	1974	12.2 (2075)	15.8 (2075)	9.5 (2075)
1973 .....	1977	11.0 (2125)	14.0 (2125)	8.8 (2125)
1978 .....	1981	10.5 (2100)	14.1 (2100)	8.0 (2100)
1980 .....	1982	10.2 (2100)	14.9 (2100)	7.2 (2100)
1990 .....	1992	11.6 (2200)	28.0 (2150)	4.3 (2150)
1996 .....	1998	11.0 (2200)	27.0 (2150)	3.5 (2150)
1998 .....	2000	10.0 (2200)	24.8 (2150)	3.2 (2150)
2002 .....	2004	9.0 (2300)	36.4 (2300)	2.3 (2300)

*Source:* United Nations, DESA, Population Division, various publications.