

**STATEMENT TO THE THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE  
COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

**REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON POPULATION, ENVIRONMENT AND  
DEVELOPMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM 3. FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

**MR. LARRY HELIGMAN  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, POPULATION DIVISION**

Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for this opportunity to introduce document E/CN.9/2001/2, the Concise Report on World Population Monitoring, focussing on the theme of “population, environment and development”. The Concise Report summarizes a larger report, which has also been provided to the Commission. For those of you who do not have a copy of the full report, it is available at the conference room distribution window under the symbol ESA/WP/164.

The general trends of population growth, economic development, and environmental change are well documented. However, how population size and growth, environmental change, and development interact with each other is not as well established. This report reviews what is known about these inter-relationships. We hope it provides you and your colleagues with the facts and issues concerning population, environment and development, what we know, what we don't know, and what are the future directions for investigation.

The report covers a broad range of issues. Topics investigated include: the evolution of population and the environment at major United Nations conferences; temporal trends in population, environment and development; Government views and policies concerning population, environment and development; interrelationships between population size and growth, environment and development; migration, population change and the rural environment; health, mortality, fertility and the environment; and population, environment and development in urban settings. As with all scientific studies, understanding the relationships among population, environment and development requires coherent theories and frameworks and timely and high-quality data. Annexes to the report deal with the availability and quality of such data and theories and frameworks for considering the impact of population growth on the physical environment.

Mr. Chairman. Population, environment and development is not a new subject for consideration by the Commission on Population and Development. This topic was the focus of debate at the very first meeting of the Population Commission in 1947, and has been a recurring

topic in the work agenda of the United Nations since then, both at the parliamentary and technical level. As the report shows, the population-environment-development nexus was actively considered at the international population conferences held in Bucharest in 1974, in Mexico City in 1984 and in Cairo in 1994, and at the UNCED Conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It has been an important topic of conference follow-up activities since then.

Mr. Chairman. I would like to highlight five salient points.

Firstly, the recently released 2000 Revision of the United Nations population estimates and projections shows that the world population is likely to reach 9.3 billion people by 2050. As was the case with world population growth in the past, future growth is expected to be diverse. For example, between 2000 and 2050, the population of the more developed regions is expected to decline by about one per cent, while the less developed regions would grow by around 67 per cent. Virtually all future population growth will be concentrated in the urban areas of the world.

Secondly, the enormous expansion in the global production of goods and services driven by technological, social and economic change has allowed the world to sustain much larger populations, and to experience vastly higher standards of living, than ever before. The benefits accruing from the unprecedented growth of the world economy have occurred among both more developed and less developed countries, but growth has been unevenly distributed, being disproportionately greater in the already more economically advanced countries.

Thirdly, this rapid and uneven population and economic growth is occurring simultaneously with degradation of aspects of the earth's physical environment. Throughout the world many fragile, biologically unique ecosystems, and the many species of plants and animals they contain, are threatened. Forest areas are diminishing. Industrial pollution and harmful run-offs from agricultural production threaten the quality of water and air. Fresh water is already in short supply in some regions -- approximately one third of the world's population lives in countries classified as experiencing moderate to severe water stress or scarcity. Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gasses continue to mount.

While all the environmental problems discussed in this report are largely or entirely the result of human activities, they vary in the extent to which they can be linked directly to population size, growth or distribution. Some environmental problems are most severe in countries where population has been growing slowly. Even for those environmental problems that are concentrated in countries with relatively rapid population growth, it is not necessarily the case that population increase is the main root cause, nor that halting population growth would resolve the problem. Other social and technological forces are usually also contributing to environmental degradation.

Nevertheless, other things being equal, continued increase in population plays an important role by increasing aggregate economic demand and hence the volume of pollution-causing production. For example, population growth is generally regarded as the single most important force driving increases in agricultural demand. The need to feed a growing population

is placing mounting stress on water supplies in many parts of the world. In some areas, population growth is an important factor contributing to deforestation.

Fourthly, population growth, structure and distribution are important aspects of environmental stress insofar as everyone requires the basic necessities of water, food, clothing, shelter and energy, which directly or indirectly affect the ecosystems. However, environmental stress is a matter not just of population change, but also of how and what people produce and consume now and in the future.

Fifthly, Mr. Chairman. Environmental change also impacts on people's welfare. Environmental change can affect health and mortality, fecundity, and the propensity of people to migrate from one place to another. For example, as documented by the most recent report of the United Nations-sponsored Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, "projected climate changes during the twenty-first century have the potential to lead to future large-scale and possible irreversible changes in Earth systems", impacting negatively on human health, particularly from increases in transmission of malaria and other vector-borne diseases.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, population pressures are contributing factors to