

NOTES, NEWS & COMMENTS

Five Thousand Million Humans

On a day or night in July, 1987, the human population of the world came to exceed 5 thousand millions, and presented us with an occasion to reflect on the likely future of a world that is currently increasing at the rate of some 80 million people every year. The prospect of 5 thousand million people in the world at one time never crossed the minds of our forebears. Few took note when the 2 thousand million mark was reached in the 1930s. But the total has been growing with increasing speed—3 thousand millions in 1960, 4 in 1975, and now 5 thousand millions. It is likely that the population of the world will reach 6 thousand millions by the end of this century, and that only then will the pace of increase become more gradual.

It is true that fears of an unmanageable 'population explosion' have proved to be unfounded. We know more today about the elaborate network which sustains life on Earth and—as a result of achievements in the economic and social fields over the past decades—we know that the world can support not only its present population but perhaps twice as many when the increase finally stops a century or so from now. But when we look at the likely future of the 120 million children who will be born this year, there is cause for concern. Nine out of 10 children are born in 'developing' countries. By definition these are the countries which are the least able to provide adequate food, shelter, education, and health-care, to the new arrivals before they can become productive adults and contribute to their countries' development.

Really developing countries are well aware of the problem, and are moving to meet it by increasing the facilities which will care for and protect mothers and children, and by striving to reduce the rate of population growth. They know, however, that smaller families come about not by the fiat of Governments but by the conscious choice of the millions of men and women about the number and spacing of children.

The decision for a smaller family takes place on a deeply personal level. People must feel within themselves that they should neither have to suffer impoverishment nor pass it on to their children. It is, therefore, part and parcel of the whole process of development and cannot be separated from it. A determined attack on the roots of poverty will create the conditions in which family planning makes sense.

Bringing about slower population growth requires the wholehearted cooperation of the entire international community, in population programmes and programmes of overall development. It is a challenge—but in the end one which must be met, for the sake of the 5 thousand millionth citizen, and for the future of the planet which we all share.

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Preamble to the World Charter for Nature*

The United Nations General Assembly:

Reaffirming the fundamental purposes of the United Nations, in particular the maintenance of international peace and security, the development of friendly relations among nations, and the achievement of international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, technical, intellectual, or humanitarian, character,

Aware that:

(a) Mankind is a part of Nature and life depends on the uninterrupted functioning of natural systems which ensure the supply of energy and nutrients,

(b) Civilization is rooted in Nature, which has shaped human culture and influenced all artistic and scientific achievement, and living in harmony with Nature gives Man the best opportunities for the development of his creativity, and for rest and recreation,

Convinced that:

(a) Every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to Man, and, to accord other organisms such recognition, Man must be guided by a moral code of action,

(b) Man can alter Nature and exhaust natural resources by his action or its consequences and, therefore, must fully recognize the urgency of maintaining the stability and quality of Nature and of conserving natural resources,

Persuaded that:

(a) Lasting benefits from Nature depend upon the maintenance of essential ecological processes and life-support systems, and upon the diversity of life-forms, which are jeopardized through excessive exploitation and habitat destruction by Man,

(b) The degradation of natural systems, owing to excessive consumption and misuse of natural resources, as well as to failure to establish an appropriate economic order among peoples and among States, leads to the breakdown of the economic, social, and political, framework of civilization,

(c) Competition for scarce resources creates conflicts, whereas the conservation of Nature and natural resources contributes to justice and the maintenance of peace and cannot be achieved until Mankind learns to live in peace and to forsake war and armaments,

Reaffirming that Man must acquire the knowledge to maintain and enhance his ability to use natural resources in a manner which ensures the preservation of the species and ecosystems for the benefit of present and future generations,

Firmly convinced of the need for appropriate measures, at the national and international, individual and collective, and private and public, levels, to protect Nature and promote international cooperation in this field,

Adopts, to these ends, the present World Charter for Nature, which proclaims the [following†] principles of conservation by which all human conduct affecting Nature is to be guided and judged.

* The actual World Charter for Nature was published in full on pages 67–8 of our Spring issue of 1983, at the first opportunity after being passed, on 28 October 1982, by the United Nations General Assembly of that year as its Resolution No. 37/7. With only minor editorial adjustments, the Preamble is repeated here, to follow, on pp. 187–8 of our latest issue. Dr Arthur H. Westing's review of the 2nd edn of Wolfgang E. Burhenne & Will A. Irwin's *World Charter for Nature: Legislative History; Commentary.*—Ed.

† Published on pp. 67–8 of our Spring issue of 1983, being *Environmental Conservation*, 10(1), 1983.—Ed.