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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

World population situation in 1981

Report of the Secretary-General

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\* A/36/50.

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report has been prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1347 (XLV) of 30 July 1968, in which the Secretary-General was requested to submit to the General Assembly biennially a concise report on the world population situation, including an assessment of the current and prospective population trends. In compliance with a decision of the Council of 8 August 1969, the report contains only the summary and conclusions of the biennial concise report on the world population situation which will be published later in the year as a United Nations publication.

2. The biennial report is based on the findings of the third round of monitoring of world population trends and policies. The monitoring of population trends was carried out by the Secretariat in collaboration with the regional commissions, the International Labour Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization. The monitoring of population policies was undertaken on the basis of information derived from the Fourth Inquiry among Governments relating to the review and appraisal of the World Population Plan of Action, the Population Policy Data Bank of the Secretariat and other official sources.

## II. DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

3. As the twentieth century draws to a close, the evidence continues to mount that a movement towards fertility decline in the developing countries is under way and the trend of moderation in the rate of growth of the world population is sustained. Recently revised estimates by the Population Division indicate that the annual rate of growth of the world population may decline to 1.5 per cent by the end of the century, from 1.7 per cent in 1980 and 2.0 per cent 15 years ago. To be sure, the decline is small and its significance lies mainly in its persistence and anticipated acceleration. Furthermore and most important, substantial population increase, mainly in many of the developing countries, will persist and will continue to be among the major factors influencing the present and future of humanity.

4. The developing countries, defined here to include all of Africa, Latin America, Asia (outside of Japan and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), and Oceania (outside of Australia and New Zealand), now absorb 70 million additional people annually, or nine tenths of the global increase, and this additional pressure on their resources and on their capacity for development is not expected to decrease significantly in the near future. In fact the projections indicate that towards the end of the century the annual addition to the population of the developing countries may well increase to 84 million or 93 per cent of the projected total annual increase in world population. If this trend continues, the population of the developing regions will increase by almost 50 per cent (1,500 or 1,600 million) between 1980 and the year 2000. This increase will materialize despite the anticipated decline in the over-all birth rate for these countries from 32.3 per 1,000 in 1980 to 25.7 in the year 2000. However, the projected decline

in the death rate from 11.5 to 8.4 per 1,000 in the same period will partially offset the impact of fertility decline so that the rate of growth will decline from 2.08 per cent to 1.73 per cent.

5. According to the United Nations world demographic estimates and projections as assessed in 1980, the total population of the world is estimated to be 4,437 million for 1980. During the past three decades, world population increased by 1.9 billion, that is from 2.5 to 4.4 billion. The medium variant projections of world population as prepared by the United Nations are 6.1 billion for the year 2000, 7.0 billion for 2010 and 8.3 billion for 2025.

6. By the end of the first quarter of the coming century, it is projected that 83 per cent of the world's population will be living in what are now the developing countries, compared to 74 per cent at present. The projections to the year 2025 also anticipate a tripling of the population of Africa, a doubling of the population of South Asia, an increase of 150 per cent in Latin America, and an increase of a little below 50 per cent in China's population.

7. The decline in the birth rate of the developing countries from about 41 per 1,000 during 1960-1965, to its current level of 32 per 1,000, was largely brought about by declines in China and in several East-Asian, Eastern South-Asian and Latin American countries. This trend has gained momentum and widening currency, but little or no decline is yet apparent in other areas, particularly in Africa and Middle and Western South Asia. Thus, fertility levels among developing countries are enormously heterogeneous at present.

8. Besides the fertility decline for the developing countries, a second important feature of the current demographic situation is the continuing fertility decline in the developed countries (Europe, Northern America, the USSR, Japan, Australia and New Zealand), a trend which has been under way since the end of the post-war "baby boom". The average birth rate in these countries declined from a high of about 22 births per 1,000 in the 1950s to 17 in 1970-1975 and to less than 16 during 1975-1980. In fact, by the mid-1970s, although fertility in the majority of these countries was already below replacement level, the large numbers of young adults who were born during the "baby boom" years of the 1950s were responsible for maintaining a positive balance of births over deaths in most countries. By the period 1975-1980, fertility was above the replacement level in 15 of 33 developed countries. Even among these 15 countries fertility rates were generally not far above the replacement level. However, very preliminary figures for several countries suggest that a reversal in this long downward trend may have begun. Although the East European countries have recently experienced a variety of fertility trends, including a temporary recovery, their current fertility levels are either below the replacement level or not far above it.

9. During the remainder of this century, as the relatively large cohorts of women of reproductive age are replaced by smaller numbers born in the 1960s and 1970s, the annual balance of births and deaths in many developed countries will become negative unless current low levels of fertility increase. Despite the fact that the rate of growth in the developed countries is projected to decline from about 0.7 at present to 0.5 near the turn of the century, the medium variant

projections of the United Nations anticipate that between 1980 and 2000 the total population of these regions will increase by about 140 million.

10. During the 1970s the annual number of legally contracted marriages per 1,000 of population steadily declined in most Western developed countries. For almost all the developed countries for which post-1970 data are available, there are clear indications of a postponement of formal marriages and a reversal of the long-standing declining trend in the age of marriage. In part this reflects the fact that important changes in attitudes towards formal marriage have been taking place in Western societies in recent years. The general pattern is that women are marrying at a later age but legal marriage is being preceded by a period of cohabitation or consensual marriage, starting at ages even below those of entry into legal marriage which were prevalent only a few years ago. The causes of these changes, though still under scrutiny, include changes in the role and status of women, easy access to efficient methods of birth control and greatly increased acceptance of cohabitation and child bearing outside legal marriage.

11. Amid fears that earlier assessments of levels and trends of mortality in many developing countries may have been too optimistic, mortality regained world attention in the 1970s as a serious demographic problem. Despite the difficulty of obtaining reliable data, all estimates indicate that mortality in Africa south of the Sahara is still very high and that, except for a small number of countries, life expectancy at birth is below 50 years and will probably fall far short of the 1985 life expectancy targets set by the World Population Plan of Action. 1/

12. The mortality situation is somewhat better in North Africa and South Asia where life expectancies are generally around 55 years. Several countries of East Asia, and others such as Kuwait, however, have managed to reduce mortality to or near the levels prevalent in developed countries. Most of Latin America also has low or relatively low mortality levels, but a slackening in the rate of decline beginning in the late 1960s has raised concern in some countries. In other countries, however, the pace of mortality decline has resumed. Mortality decline in the developed countries gained momentum in the 1970s, and in several of these countries female life expectancy has reached 78 years.

13. On the whole, it seems that mortality levels in Africa south of the Sahara remain the highest in the world, with levels of life expectancy at birth remaining well below 50 years and that, among developing regions, this area has made the least progress in lowering mortality during recent years. In contrast, most South Asian countries have life expectancies in the range of 50 to 60 years and recent estimates of life expectancy in China exceed 65 years. The majority of countries in Latin America also enjoy a life expectancy of more than 60 years.

14. When national populations are stratified by socio-economic factors, such as place of residence and education, mortality differences appear to be more pronounced in developing than in developed countries. For example, unlike the

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1/ Report of the United Nations World Population Conference, Bucharest, 19-30 August 1974 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.75.XIII.3), chap. I.

developed countries where urban-rural differences have tended to disappear, rural communities in many developing countries have much higher mortality rates than are observed in urban areas, with the difference reaching 50 per cent or more of the urban levels.

15. Infant mortality remains most critical in Africa and South Asia. Whether in Africa south of the Sahara, where levels in virtually all countries are between 150 and 200 deaths per 1,000 live births, or in North Africa and South Asia where they are generally within the range of 100-150, infant mortality rates are much higher than levels prevalent elsewhere. Low levels of infant mortality, however, are not confined to the developed countries where they are mostly between 7 and 15; a number of developing countries have also made impressive gains during the last decade and brought infant mortality rates down to levels below 30. Child mortality (ages 1 to 4) also remains very high in many developing regions. Available estimates range up to 40 per 1,000, while in the developed countries these rates are 1 per 1,000 or less.

16. Although population age structure does not normally change rapidly, declining fertility in the developing countries has caused a corresponding decline in the proportion of children and the young (ages 0-14) from 42 per cent in 1970 to an estimated 39 per cent at present. Though the proportion is still much higher than the 23 per cent observed in the developed countries, the decline is significant and largely brought about by fertility decline in China. The proportion of the population 65 years of age and older in developing countries, though still relatively small, is growing rapidly, and in some countries where fertility is declining rapidly, it will not be long before the social and health problems of this age group are as important as they are at present in the developed countries. These countries already have 11 per cent of their population in this age group, and the proportion is expected to increase to 13 per cent in 2000.

17. Urban population is increasingly becoming a concern to policy makers, particularly in the developing countries. Since the middle of this century, the urban population of these countries has increased almost fourfold to about one billion and, in 1975, it accounted for a majority of the world's urban population for the first time in modern history. With a growth rate of almost 4 per cent at present, the urban population of developing countries is expected to double over the next two decades and to exceed the urban population of developed countries by a margin of two to one. The growth rate of the urban population of the developed countries is currently 1.4 per cent and has been consistently declining. Between now and the year 2000 it is estimated that it will increase by only about 25 per cent. The developed countries are thus expected to be about 80 per cent urban in that year. This high level of urbanization in developed countries, in connexion with the rapid urban population growth in developing countries, will lead to a significant milestone in human demographic history in 2000; by then the world's population, which had always been largely rural, will become predominantly urban.

18. The substantial urban growth in the developing countries, which would make these countries 44 per cent urban in 2000 compared to only 17 per cent in 1950 and 31 per cent in 1980, has been the result of both urban natural increase and rural-

urban migration, with the latter playing a somewhat smaller role. Urban growth thus does not imply an alleviation of population pressure in the rural areas. In fact, the population of rural areas is now increasing at an average rate of 1.4 per cent and although projections anticipate a rapid decline in this rate, an increase in the rural population of 500 million, or more than one fifth, during the next two decades is implied. During the same period the rural population of the developed countries is expected to decline by one fifth.

19. A main feature of current and anticipated urban growth is that it is "large-city" oriented. This trend is particularly obvious in the developing countries where, during the last decade, the number of cities of 4 million or more inhabitants increased from 12 to 23; this number is expected to exceed 60 in the year 2000. The projections indicate that by the turn of the century a quarter of the urban population of the developing countries will be living in such cities. This type of expansion is at the expense of towns with a population of half a million or less in both developed and developing countries. The share of these towns has declined from 58 per cent of the world's urban population in 1970 to 54 per cent at present and is expected to continue its decline to slightly under 50 per cent in 2000. Cities of between half a million and four million persons, though increasing substantially in numbers, are maintaining a relatively stable share of the urban population.

20. The early 1970s witnessed a continuation of the earlier pattern of international migration, namely the movement of workers from poorer to richer countries (mainly males in search of employment in areas enjoying economic growth and rising demand for labour). This pattern described movements between Latin America and Northern America, within Europe, and into Europe from North Africa and Asia. In the European countries of immigration, the inward movement of workers has stabilized though the stocks are still substantial.

21. After being a region of long-term net immigration, Latin America since 1960 has become a region of substantial net emigration owing to a reduced inflow from Southern Europe and increased emigration to the United States of America. Immigration into Canada from Latin America, mostly the Caribbean, rose steeply during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Another important and apparently increasing international flow is that of undocumented migrants. Such flows are difficult to estimate but they are known to have reached substantial numbers in the United States, Venezuela and some Middle Eastern countries.

22. A new pattern of international migration, which has gained momentum during the last decade, is the flow of migrants to the oil-exporting countries of Western Asia and elsewhere in the developing countries. It is estimated that the number of migrant workers employed in the oil-exporting Arab countries, coming mainly from other countries in the region, has doubled between 1970 and 1975, reaching about two million in the latter year. Similarly, there are substantial numbers of migrant workers in some West African countries who come from land-locked countries to their north. An analogous but declining flow exists in southern Africa.

23. Outbreaks of repatriation flows and refugee movements continued during the last decade. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United

Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East reported that as of early 1980, there were about 10.5 million refugees and displaced persons. The size and suddenness of the flows have imposed severe strains on the receiving countries. The continent with the largest number of refugees and displaced persons is Africa.

### III. GOVERNMENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND POLICIES

24. In 1980 most Governments considered the problems arising from their population situations to be critical factors for the success of their national development plans. They recognized that population problems were not limited to rates of growth but also included an uneven distribution of the population within and among nations. Increased attention is being paid to the individual as well as national aspects of fertility issues. Furthermore, national recognition of the importance of population and its relationship to economic and social development has been accompanied by a growing awareness of the possible international consequences of national population policies.

25. Currently, a majority of Governments consider the trend in the rate of natural increase to be among the most important determining factors in the formulation of their development policies. World-wide, 35 countries out of a total of 165 perceive an increased rate of growth as desirable and 75 other countries express satisfaction with their rate of natural increase. However 55 countries have indicated a desire to reduce their rate of population growth. All 55 are developing countries and together they comprise 59 per cent of the world's population and 79 per cent of the population of developing countries.

26. None of the developed countries desire a lower rate of natural increase. In sharp contrast to this most developing countries having populations of more than 50 million consider that their rates of natural increase are too high. With some notable exceptions, the developing countries that are satisfied with their rates of growth, or perceive them as too low, are the smaller countries where the level of mortality is still very high.

27. Governmental intervention with regard to the rate of natural increase is seldom undertaken in an isolated manner. The usual practice is to combine various interventions producing sets of multi-dimensional population policies.

28. When the rate of natural increase is considered to be satisfactory, emphasis is placed on fertility policy measures aimed at improving individual well-being. In this situation spatial distribution policies also play an important role. This is also true of policies for international migration and changes in the socio-economic structure. On the other hand, when the rate of natural increase is perceived as being too high, emphasis is generally placed on policies aimed at reducing fertility in combination with policies relating to spatial distribution. The recognition of socio-economic structures may also receive a relatively high priority.

29. In those cases where the rate of natural increase is considered too low, one of the following situations may exist: both fertility and mortality rates are

high, or else both are low. In the first case, typified by countries in the early stages of demographic transition, priority is accorded to a reduction in mortality. In the second case, typified by countries in the last phase of their demographic transition, the emphasis is placed on fertility increase with explicit demographic and "well-being" objectives.

30. The reduction of mortality and the improvement of the health status of the population are universal development objectives. Therefore intervention to reduce mortality and to improve health status has a high priority among all Governments. However, Governments for whom mortality and morbidity policies also serve demographic objectives are few in number and consist largely of those that consider their rate of natural increase to be too low.

31. Out of a total of 165 countries, 107 consider their current life expectancy unacceptable. Nearly all of the 50 countries having an expectancy of life at birth of less than 50 years feel that their level is unacceptable, while only 7 out of 42 countries which attained a life expectancy of more than 70 years consider their level unacceptable. Thus among the 39 industrialized countries only 9 consider their level of life expectancy unacceptable while 98 of 126 developing countries perceive their life expectancy at birth as unacceptable.

32. In the developed countries increased efforts are being directed at reducing the socio-economic differentials between various categories of the population, differentials which have important implications for mortality. In the developing countries the distribution of deaths by age and cause reflect the importance of the proportion of deaths in the 0 to 4 age group and the predominance in all age groups of deaths due to causes that could be easily averted by utilizing inexpensive cures and through an improvement in living conditions. Since the International Conference on Primary Health Care, held at Alma-Ata from 6 to 12 September 1978, increased attention has been given to primary health care, especially for high-risk groups such as infants, women of child-bearing age, rural populations and the under-privileged living in urban areas.

33. Globally, 22 countries consider their fertility rates too low and 59 too high, and 84 countries express satisfaction with their current rate. In the developed countries 8 out of 39 consider their level of fertility too low, the remaining 31 countries consider it satisfactory. In the 126 developing countries only 14 consider their fertility level too low; 53 consider it to be satisfactory and 59 consider their fertility too high. World-wide, 17 of the 22 countries which consider their fertility too low intervene, as do 38 of the 59 countries which consider their fertility too high. Among the 84 countries which consider their fertility satisfactory, 31 have adopted measures to maintain fertility at current levels.

34. In developed countries the types of fertility intervention may be grouped into three categories: legal measures, economic measures and measures aimed at reducing the conflicts between economic activity and motherhood. Legal measures permitting couples to exercise their reproductive choices have evolved considerably. Only 3 of the 39 developed countries still restrict access to modern methods of contraception. On the other hand, 13 permit abortion on demand, 16 permit it for



socio-economic reasons and 28 permit it on broad medical grounds. Legislation concerning sterilization is more difficult to interpret; however, it appears that 16 countries permit sterilization on demand, 2 for socio-economic reasons and 2 on medical grounds.

35. Most modern States have systems of compensation for expenses incurred in rearing children or provide family allowances; and some of them are pursuing, in addition to the objective of social justice, the objective of maintaining or increasing fertility. Pronatalist countries have also adopted measures aimed at resolving the conflict between motherhood and employment, thus creating the conditions necessary for a resumption of natality. Some Eastern European countries have not only instituted legal measures or arrangements allowing mothers to meet their educational responsibilities and improve their professional qualifications, but they have also introduced paid leaves to mothers for child care.

36. Among the 126 developing countries, 38 have adopted policies designed specifically to reduce fertility. The major directions taken by these antinatalist policies consist of a package of measures aimed at improving the supply of family planning services and increasing the demand for them by encouraging parents to have fewer children. On the supply side, Governments have adopted both legal and technical measures. On the demand side, policy interventions include economic incentives or disincentives, information and education measures, legal measures and actions of a general nature concerning the socio-economic determinants of fertility behaviour.

37. Only 9 of 126 developing countries still restrict access to modern methods of contraception, while 81 countries support direct access to these methods. In developing countries for which information is available, 5 countries permit abortion on demand, 9 for socio-economic reasons and 46 on broad medical grounds. Of the 101 developing countries for which information is available, 27 countries permit sterilization on demand, 4 permit it for socio-economic reasons, 7 for reasons linked exclusively to family planning, and 21 for medical reasons; the remainder allow it only on narrowly restricted grounds.

38. In recent years a number of measures have been taken to improve the distribution and supply of family planning services. They include a trend towards integrating these programmes with health services and reorienting them towards the grass-roots communities, emphasizing such units as the village, neighbourhood and factory. These measures also include increased use of paramedical personnel and the sale of contraceptives through non-medical channels, both traditional and modern.

39. The greatest expansion in recent years seems to have been in the use of economic incentives or disincentives to influence the demand for birth control services. They are aimed at individuals and increasingly at grass-roots communities. Though economic incentives are more common than disincentives, recent developments in China and other Asian countries have confirmed the effectiveness of these measures when applied in the socio-economic context specific to the country's stage of development.

40. Information campaigns using traditional and modern media have received substantial support from Governments. Among the legal measures which have had a significant effect on fertility are changes in the age at marriage. Since the World Population Conference at Bucharest, considerable interest has been shown in interventions based on the socio-economic determinants of fertility such as education, health, employment, income distribution, status of women and agrarian reform. However, development plans adopted by countries having anti-natalist policies indicate that efforts made in these sectors have in most cases been undertaken for non-demographic reasons.

41. Among the demographic processes considered to be most frequently associated with problems of development, the spatial distribution of the population occupies first place, especially in developing countries. World-wide, only 19 countries out of 165 consider the geographical distribution of their population to be acceptable. Of the 126 developing countries only 6 consider it acceptable, 45 consider it unacceptable to some degree and 75 consider the geographical distribution of their population largely unacceptable.

42. Government policies in this regard include those aimed at modifying the flow of migrants and those aimed at changing the spatial configuration of human settlements. Of the 39 developed countries, 22 wish to reduce migration and 6 seek to reverse the flow. The remainder indicate no intervention relating to migration from rural to urban areas. With regard to urban configuration (e.g. establishment of new towns) or rural configuration (e.g. development of rural areas), 18 developed countries take no specific action while 16 intervene only with regard to urban configuration. The remaining 5 countries intervene with regard to both rural and urban configuration.

43. In the developing countries, the urban population has been growing at an accelerated pace. In particular, the major cities have continued to grow at an unprecedented rate. The net result has been a gigantic transfer of population from the traditional to the modern sector. Governments of developing countries are very conscious of the gravity of the situation: 120 of the 126 countries consider the spatial distribution of their population to be unacceptable.

44. Only 4 of 126 developing countries are trying to increase the flow of rural to urban migrants, 79 are trying to reduce the flow and 15 are trying to reverse it. Only 28 countries do not intervene. With regard to spatial configuration, 54 countries do not intervene; 60 intervene with regard to both rural and urban configuration, 21 with regard to urban configuration only and 30 with regard to rural configuration only.

45. The strategies adopted in developing countries to cope with the increase in their urban populations are often focused on the major cities. A frequently observed policy is to distribute the flow of migrants between the metropolitan agglomeration and other urban centres. The strategy of growth poles (through either the development of older towns or the creation of new towns) is an illustration of this policy. Other countries have altered their spatial distribution policies by giving priority to the development of rural areas. To an

increasing extent Governments are assigning roles to urban and rural development which are more complementary and less conflicting.

46. International migration is more susceptible than most other demographic processes to the vicissitudes of economic, social and political conditions. Although long-standing trends continue, established migratory flows can be quickly altered. Conversely, new trends may emerge, forcing Governments to take new measures.

47. Globally, the number of countries which consider immigration to be demographically significant is 47 out of 165. Of the 15 developed countries where immigration is considered significant, 9 consider current levels satisfactory; 5 consider it too high and 1 considers it too low. Of the 32 developing countries where immigration is considered significant, 11 consider it satisfactory, 16 consider it too high and 5 consider it too low. World-wide, 51 of 165 countries intervene to influence immigration, 9 to increase it, 25 to reduce it and 17 to maintain it at current levels.

48. A few major poles of attraction draw most of the flow of immigration throughout the world. Among these the oil countries of the Middle East and North Africa are still a favoured destination for immigrants, most of whom are temporary workers of increasingly diverse origin. In these countries immigration which used to be spontaneous and individual, has increasingly become organized and collective.

49. The European countries have policies which emphasize the management of the stock of immigrants residing in the country rather than the migratory flows themselves. These policies have a threefold purpose: (a) to stabilize or reduce the immigrant population; (b) to better integrate the foreign population allowed to remain in the host country, and (c) to facilitate the reunification of immigrant families. Although not designed explicitly to achieve demographic objectives, these policies will also have important demographic consequences in the host country.

50. In Northern America, and particularly in the United States, the past two years have been marked by the mass arrival of refugees. Illegal migration has also continued and is now believed to surpass the number of legal migrants, with the result that there is increased concern for controlling different migratory movements more effectively and revising the principles underlying current immigration policies. In Latin America and in Africa immigration is generally of an intra-regional character and often is illegal in form; nevertheless these migratory flows play a role which performs de facto the function of temporary migration in Europe.

51. Emigration is considered demographically significant by 10 of 39 developed countries and 51 of 126 developing countries. Similarly policies relating to emigration exist in 10 developed countries out of 39 and 50 developing countries out of 126. Some countries of the southern Mediterranean basin have adopted a deliberate policy of re-integration of workers, indicating that they no longer

consider emigration an important way to solve their employment problems. In Asia some countries are trying to link exports of their manpower to exports of capital goods they produce. Other countries are endeavouring to organize emigration systematically by controlling its volume and structure. Some have even set quantitative emigration targets in their development plans.

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