

# Q: Should population control be a priority for the Third World?

**Yes: Vanishing forests and widespread famines are signs of crisis in many nations.**

BY WERNER FORNOS



*Fornos is president of the Population Institute, a group dedicated to achieving a more equitable balance between the world's population, environment and resources.*

The term "population control" has an unfortunate and misleading connotation. "Control" seems to infer force and coercion, which I categorically oppose on moral and ethical grounds. My opposition goes beyond mere semantics. There are those who would have us believe that *all* population and family-planning programs are rooted in force and coercion; that simply is untrue. At least some of those who peddle that particular bill of goods are snake-oil salesmen who know better or should.

Fertility rates have declined during the last 40 years, from six children per woman to slightly less than three. Anyone who honestly thinks that this is the result of force and coercion simply does not understand human nature or the limitations on the ability of governments to make people do — or, perhaps in this case, not do — something against their will. The magnitude of the power that would have to be exercised to influence the most personal of decisions so successfully during the last four decades simply defies the imagination.

*Voluntary* family-planning information, education and services should be universally available and accessible. According to the United Nations, there are some 350 million couples throughout the world who lack access to, or the means to acquire, modern contraceptives. An estimated 120 million of those couples would use safe and effective family-planning methods immediately if they were available. The Population Institute strives for universal access to a variety of family-planning methods.

In the last year, world population surpassed the 6 billion mark. World population is growing annually by nearly 80 mil-

lion, the equivalent of the population of Germany. Ninety-five percent of that growth takes place in the developing world, by definition the poorest countries in the world. There are 62 countries with populations on course to double in 30 years or less and 84 countries whose governments officially have stated that their birth rates are high.

There are a number of environmentalists who can produce voluminous scientific data to demonstrate that our planet already has exceeded its sustainable limits. Just for starters, they point to such chilling statistics as the following: 1.3 billion people live in absolute poverty on the equivalent of one U.S. dollar or less per day, 1.5 billion people lack access to an adequate supply of clean water and 790 million people go to bed hungry every night.

There are those who say that poverty, hunger and water issues really are social, economic, technological and political problems — not population problems. Certainly politics, economics and technology all fit into the poverty/hunger/misery equation, but when you see abandoned children begging for a scrap of bread in the streets of Lagos, Nigeria, or Lahore, India, or Lima, Peru, can anyone deny that these are children whose parents were unable to care for them? And think back to the 350 million couples who are unable to regulate their own fertility because they lack access to, or the means to obtain, family-planning information, education and services.

Almost from the inception of the development of national family-planning programs some 40 to 45 years ago, the argument surfaced that there must first be economic stability before there can be a smaller-family-size norm. And, generally speaking, industrialized countries do tend to have fertility rates that are lower than those in less-developed countries.

I am a strong believer in the free-market system, though I have never been convinced that capitalism is the best contraceptive. But those who believe development must precede

*(continued on page 42)*

# No: Declining fertility worldwide causes the problem of too few children, not too many.

BY STEPHEN W. MOSHER



*Mosher is the president of the Population Research Institute in Front Royal, Va., and is the author of the book, Hegemon: China's Plan to Dominate Asia and the World.*

These recommendations were adopted and carried out. For the last quarter-century, the United States and its allies have carried out a covert war on people in the developing world. In 1998 alone, the Clinton administration spent \$385 million to promote abortion, perform sterilizations and ship contraceptives to countries around the world. And still this is not enough for the "contraceptor in chief": Clinton has vowed to increase population

"If they would rather die they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

— *Ebenezer Scrooge in A Christmas Carol*  
by Charles Dickens.

Since the sixties, population alarmists have been predicting demographic disaster for the human race. The prophecies of "population bomber" Paul Ehrlich have been the most notorious. In 1972 he warned that 65 million Americans would die of starvation by 1985, and hundreds of millions would perish elsewhere. Needless to say, this predicted decimation never happened.

Great advances in agriculture — we have set new records for global grain production in 16 of the last 30 years — have left us better off than ever before. Although an estimated 1,644 people still die from malnutrition each day, this is only about one-fortieth of the number claimed by the population fear-mongers. Moreover, those deaths that do occur primarily are a consequence of civil war in which food frequently is used as a weapon. Opposing armies target civilian populations for extinction, destroying their crops and interdicting relief columns.

Still, the prophecies of Ehrlich and others have fueled massive programs, through the U.N. Fund for Population Activities, or UNFPA, and other agencies, to constrict human fertility, especially in the developing world. Why is the developed world so determined to reduce population growth in the developing world? One answer comes from Charles Ravenholt, former director of the Population Office of the U.S. Agency for International Development: "Population control is needed to maintain the normal operation of the United States' commercial interests around the world."

This view is more than just Ravenholt's personal opinion, for it is enshrined in an official document of the U.S. government titled "Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests." Drafted by the National Security Council under the direction of Henry Kissinger — and secretly published as National Security Study Memorandum 200 on Dec. 10, 1974 — this document declares that: "The U.S. economy will require large and increasing amounts of minerals from abroad, especially from less-developed countries. That fact gives the U.S. enhanced interest in political, economic, and social stability of the supplying countries. Wherever a lessening of population pressures through reduced birth rates can increase the prospects for such stability, population policy becomes relevant to resource supplies and to the economic interests of the United States."

spending to a whopping \$561 million this year.

To mask U.S. involvement and allay Third World suspicions, population-control aid is funneled through the UNFPA and nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs, such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation, or IPPF. For the same reason, strenuous efforts were made to create the appearance of an international "consensus" on the need for population control at the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development and elsewhere. The "surplus population" of the Third World must not suspect that it is being deliberately "reduced."

In part because of urbanization, modernization and industrialization — as well as U.S. efforts to export a contraceptive mentality — global population growth now is slowing dramatically. Fertility rates in country after country are falling below replacement. According to the latest U.N. Population Division (not to be confused with the UNFPA) figures, fully 71 countries — representing almost half the world's population — now have below-replacement fertility rates. Those countries with still-healthy fertility rates — more than 2.2 children per woman — grow fewer in number with each passing year.

Humanity's long-term problem will not be too many children, but too few children. The UNFPA, as well as population-control programs in general, have outlived whatever usefulness they may once have possessed. Why should the United States spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year to reduce fertility in countries whose populations all too soon will be in decline?

In Europe's graying present we can see the world's future. This year, for the first time since the Black Death in the Middle Ages, Europe's population will decline. Population projections point to a demographic debacle of the first order in the decades to come. Worried governments from the Mediterranean to the Baltic have begun to encourage couples to bear children, as well as reward them for doing so. To date such programs have had little effect.

The picture for the world as a whole is little better. The current world total-fertility rate is at 2.48 children per woman, not far above replacement. Given high infant-mortality rates in many parts of the world, the replacement fertility rate is about 2.2 children per woman, a figure that will be reached by 2005. For all practical purposes, then, the world currently is at zero population growth. Should current trends continue, the total fertility rate will fall to only

*(continued on page 43)*

fertility reductions nearly always haul out the examples of Singapore and Hong Kong, two islands of capitalism in a less-developed region that have lowered their fertility rates. A little more homework reveals that both of those states were among the first to adopt family-planning programs back in the 1950s and 1960s. Meanwhile, Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka are examples of countries where there have been considerable fertility declines before the advent of industrialization.

Pronatalists seem to view the Earth through a peculiar prism that blocks out human activity as a factor in forests vanishing, water scarcity, topsoil erosion, desert expansion, unprecedented global climate change and diminishing finite resources.

There is, however, a preponderance of solid evidence to refute claims that population growth no longer is a significant issue. For example, while world population climbed by 75 percent in the 20th century, an estimated 75 percent of global forested area was lost — much of it for living space, farmland and firewood, which still is the leading source of cooking and heating fuel in the developing world. In addition:

- Nearly half a billion people around the world face water shortages and, by 2025, the number is expected to grow to 2.8 billion — 35 percent of the projected world population of 8 billion for that year.

- The 15 warmest years on record have occurred during the last 21 years and all major scientific bodies acknowledge that climate change now is under way. According to the International Panel on Climate Change, a two-thirds reduction in global carbon-dioxide emissions would be required to avoid a doubling of atmospheric concentrations that may jeopardize food production, the Earth's biodiversity and entire ecosystems, as well as human health.

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture notes that since the mid-20th century the world's population has soared by 132 percent, while the world's cropland has increased by only 19 percent.

- Complications relating to pregnancy and childbirth are among the leading causes of mortality among reproductive-age women in many parts of the developing world. Nearly 600,000 women die each year of pregnancy-related causes — about one every minute — 99 percent of them in developing countries.

- An estimated 160 million children today are considered to be malnourished. A recent report by the International Food Policy Research Institute estimates that 20 years from now the number of malnourished will decline to 135 million — a decrease of only 15 percent.

- Ten million children died before reaching their fifth birthday in 1998, and nearly 8 million of them did not reach

their first birthday. About 98 percent of child deaths occurred in developing countries, with the least-developed countries accounting for a third of all deaths under age 5.

- Thirty million new jobs must be found each year for the next 50 years in order to keep pace with projected population growth, according to a special report by the Worldwatch Institute.

At the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, or ICPD, 179 nations approved the Cairo Program of Action, a blueprint for preventing world population

from doubling again as it has in the last 40 years. To achieve a sustainable future, it is important to implement the Cairo document — especially in the areas of ensuring universal access to family planning; achieving greater male responsibility in sexual and reproductive behavior and parenthood; and eradicating female illiteracy and increasing employment opportunities for women, both of which would lead to gender equality and smaller family size.

The key to implementing the ICPD Program of Action is the mobilization of resources for population and family planning programs. It appears unlikely that the

ICPD goal of raising \$17 billion for reproductive-health and family-planning activities by this year will be reached. According to a report by the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, the consequences of the failure to meet this goal include: an estimated additional 42 million unintended pregnancies, 17 million induced abortions and 90,000 maternal deaths.

By cutting back on its international population assistance from nearly \$600 million in fiscal 1995 to \$385 million in the current fiscal year, the U.S. government has ill-served the cause of stabilizing world population. As the world's only remaining superpower, the United States has abrogated its leadership in one of the most crucial issues of our time. The result has been a domino effect, with other nations choosing to follow the U.S. lead and reduce their population-assistance budgets. There is a ray of hope that the situation will change. The White House has signaled that it will seek to restore U.S. international population spending to its fiscal 1995 level of nearly \$600 million. Additionally, Congress, after failing to appropriate any contribution at all to the U.N. Fund for Population Activities in fiscal 1999, has voted to contribute \$25 million to the fund in fiscal 2000 and again in fiscal 2001.

In the final analysis, it is the childbearing decisions of 3 billion young people — who will reach their reproductive years within the next generation — that ultimately will determine whether world population will level off at the lowest possible figure that can be reached through voluntary family planning and humane interventions. At stake will be the kind of world they want for themselves and their children. ●

## The consequences of not stabilizing population include 42 million unintended pregnancies, 17 million abortions and 90,000 maternal deaths.



MOSHER: *continued from page 41*

one child per woman by the end of the next century. At this anemic rate the world's population will be cut in half each generation.

Even in the developing world the population growth is slowing dramatically. The current population of the developing regions of the world is about 4.84 billion. It will peak at about 6.4 billion in 2040 and then begin a slow but accelerating decline to about 4.3 billion in 2100.

The developing world is following in the developed world's demographic footsteps, with this disturbing difference: The developed world grew rich before it grew old. The developing world will grow old before it grows rich. Whether this will condemn developing countries to perpetual poverty remains to be seen.

Given these sobering demographic realities, the UNFPA and all population-control programs clearly have outlived whatever usefulness they once may have possessed. Such programs should be terminated before they do even more damage to humanity's future.

The next session of Congress may do exactly that. In March the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution urging the United Nations to curb the Chinese-style abuses endemic to many population-control programs. Earlier, Congress zeroed out UNFPA's annual \$25 million subsidy because of that agency's ill-considered decision to resume participating in China's infamous one-child-per-family policy.

UNFPA advocates claim that the cutoff of \$25 million in U.S. funding "has deprived 870,000 women in developing countries of modern contraception, leading to half a million unintended pregnancies, 200,000 abortions and thousands of maternal and child deaths."

These numbers are grossly inflated and misleading. Even if they were correct, however, this still would be a wasteful and inefficient way to reduce maternal and infant mortality. If the entire \$25 million were spent in Nigeria, which has one of the highest maternal-mortality rates in the world — there are 1,030 deaths of mothers per 100,000 live births — then the UNFPA would claim that 5,150 lives would be saved. The cost per life saved would be \$4,854.

Far more lives could be saved if this money were spent on other health-care measures, such as maternal tetanus immunizations. Were \$25 million to be put toward tetanus immunizations for mothers, the lives of 198,400 African babies could be saved at an average cost of \$126 per child saved. This strategy would save nearly 40 times as many lives as the UNFPA claims to save by contracepting and sterilizing women.

If the \$25 million were spent on breast-feeding promotion

among AIDS-free mothers, the lives of more than 50,000 African infants would be saved — more than nine times as many as would be saved if the money were given to the UNFPA.

Spending the funds on having trained medical personnel attend births also would save tens of thousands of lives, as U.N. statistics show. In African countries, where an average of only 15 percent of all births are attended, the maternal-mortality ratio is a high 1,340 per 100,000 births. Where an average of 83 percent of all births are attended, the maternal-mortality ratio dips to 320 per 100,000 births. If the \$25 million were spent on attending births, assuming a cost of \$50 per attended birth, an additional 500,000 births could be attended. This would save the lives of 7,500 mothers and 42,500

infants — more than nine times as many as the UNFPA claims can be saved by distributing contraceptives.

In short, as many as 193,000 women and babies will die if the \$25 million is restored to UNFPA instead of going toward primary health-care programs. Think how much good we could do with the funds now poured into urging — and even insisting — that families not welcome children, were the funds used instead to provide basic health services and sanitation.

Most so-called "modern" contraceptives are designed for use by healthy women of the developed world. Their

indiscriminate use by women in the developing world who may be malnourished, anemic or otherwise in poor health can lead to serious medical problems. With follow-up care nearly nonexistent, these problems go untreated.

The UNFPA also claims that widely available contraception leads to a decline in abortion. But one only has to look at the relationship between contraception and abortion in the United States to unravel this specious argument. Fully 94.8 percent of sexually active women in this country now either are sterile or use some form of contraception — yet the abortion rate has not changed significantly since 1975.

Contraceptive use in developing countries has increased from about 8 percent of all couples in 1960 to about 60 percent of all couples in 1998. Yet the number of legal and illegal abortions worldwide continues to increase, reaching an estimated 55 million per year by the early nineties, according to the statistics provided by the IPPF. If contraceptives truly were the answer to reducing "unwanted pregnancies," we should have seen a drop or a leveling out in the number of abortions worldwide. Instead, the numbers continue to increase.

The final reason that population-control programs should be ended — yesterday — is straightforward: We as a people simply have no business telling families in the Third World how many children they should or should not have. ●

**The U.N. Fund for Population Activities and all population-control programs clearly have outlived whatever usefulness they once may have possessed.**