

QUAKER ECO-BULLETIN

Information and Action Addressing Public Policy for an Ecologically Sustainable World

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Population

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The Problem

The population of *Homo sapiens* on planet earth has grown very rapidly over the past century from 1.6 billion in 1900 to 2 billion in 1930, 3 billion in 1960, 4 billion in 1974, 5 billion in 1987 and 6 billion in 1999. We are currently adding 75-80 million persons per year to the world. Of this yearly growth, 16 million are added in India, 9 million in China, 4 million in Pakistan and 3 million in both Bangladesh and Indonesia. More concretely, about 200,000 more persons need food and housing today than yesterday! The United Nations medium projection estimates that there will be 9.3 billion persons on the planet in 2050.

Over 95% of population growth is in developing countries. By contrast, nearly all the developed countries have current fertility below replacement level (2.1 births per woman) and 18 of them had more deaths than births in 1999. The average number of children per woman in the world is 2.7 (3.0 in developing countries and 1.6 in developed countries).

The population of the U.S. grew from 4 million in 1790 to 76 million in 1900 to 151 million in 1950 and 281 million were counted in the 2000 census. The U.S. is growing by 3-4 million persons per year with approximately 1/2 of that due to more births than deaths and the other half due to (legal and illegal) immigration. Fertility in the U.S. is nearly at replacement level, but there is still an excess of births over deaths because there are large numbers of persons in the reproductive ages due to higher fertility in earlier decades. Thus, even if U.S. couples have an average of two children, population will continue to grow for about 70 years. The medium projection of the U.S. population to 2050 is 400 million people. In short, we can expect more and more sprawl.

Solutions

Several environmental organizations have population programs—typically with a major goal of educating the American public about the relationship between population growth and the environment. For example some state chapters of the Sierra Club have population committees.

Women's level of education is the strongest single background predictor of population fertility levels. While education is a long-term solution, access to family planning allows a woman to immediately delay or limit births and thereby gives her an opportunity for other activities. For example, intensive government family planning programs in countries like

Bangladesh and Indonesia have been able to meet family planning needs of most of the population, and thereby reduce population growth rates. Access to modern contraception is a problem in some parts of the world, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa which has the highest fertility. The U.S. and Western Europe have about the same levels of sexual activity among teens, but the pregnancy rate in Western Europe is half that of the U.S.; the reason is that in the U.S. we make it quite difficult for a sexually active teenager to obtain contraception. Somewhere between 100 and 200 million couples in the world want to space their next birth or stop childbearing completely but do not have access to modern contraception. At the United Nations Population Conference in 1994 in Cairo, 179 nations agreed on the importance of family planning and integrated programs of reproductive health. The UN estimates that to provide everyone on earth with adequate reproductive health services, it would cost \$17 billion per year; \$11 billion of this would come from national governments and \$6 billion from international assistance.

Unfortunately this level of funding has not been forthcoming, particularly the international assistance. The US is giving \$425 million to population assistance this year. This amounts to \$1.52 per person per year. Compare this with about \$300 billion for the US military budget or about \$1100 per person per year. In Denmark, by contrast, international population assistance totals \$47 million or \$8.90 per person per year.

U.S. Policy

In his first day in office, President Bush reinstated the U.S. policy that prohibits use of any U.S. foreign assistance monies to any family planning organization that counsels women about the option of abortion, even in countries where it is legal and even if the organization uses its own monies for same. This policy is known as the "Mexico City Policy" because it was first announced by a delegate from the Reagan administration in 1984 at the United Nations Population Conference held in Mexico City.

But cutting off funds for contraception, will lead to more abortions, not less. Some of the U.S. media confused the issue by saying that funds were being cut off for abortions, but there has not been U.S. assistance for abortions overseas since the 1970s.

Role of Friends

As Friends we are concerned about the future of our species as well as other species and the natural environment generally. Human encroachment and resultant habitat destruction have put us in an age of mass extinction of other species. For example, in California, of 286 species that are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, urban sprawl is a contributing cause in 188 (66%) of cases. Those who estimate the earth's carrying capacity point out that as standards of living increase around the world, we can anticipate further ecological disasters. It is estimated that if all 6 billion of us had a lifestyle like that of North Americans, it would take three "planets earth" to support the current world population. It is clear that the population numbers must level off soon or there will be more irreparable damage to the earth's natural systems as well as negative consequences for our own species, such as increased violence as populations fight for scarce resources like water.

Some Friends feel that, given the disproportionate use of resources by persons in developed countries, and given our simple living testimony, it is more important for Friends to work on decreasing consumption here rather than on stabilizing population elsewhere. The truth is that it is very important to work on both matters and that they are linked, but separate. Specifically, our living simply does not necessarily provide the option of modern contraception for women in rural Africa who want to stop bearing children, but our working to increase family planning assistance can.

With regard to Friends' organizations, AFSC does not presently have programs where the main purpose is providing contraceptive services. However, they are provided in several health projects that AFSC assists. FCNL staff cover legislation concerning population as time permits but it is not a legislative priority as determined by Friends through the priority-setting in their Monthly Meetings. Several yearly meetings have approved minutes on population concerns (Baltimore, Illinois, SAYMA). These are available through the FCUN office.

Friends can help by actively supporting legislation and public policy that:

- 1) increase funding for international population assistance,
- 2) make contraceptives available in school-based clinics in the U.S,
- 3) develop a U.S. population policy, and
- 4) allow advertising of contraceptives, and especially condoms, in the media.

For more information:

- Zero Population Growth gives a monthly update on legislative matters: <heather@zpg.org>.
- Information on U.S. population is available through the U.S. Census Bureau <www.census.gov/people/estimate> (or projections).
- The United Nations population projections and other reports can be found at <www.un.org/esa/population>.
- U.S. vital statistics are available at <www.cdc.gov/nchs>.

Quaker Eco-Bulletin (QEB) is published bi-monthly as an insert in *BeFriending Creation* by **Quaker Eco-Witness**, a project of **Friends Committee on Unity with Nature (FCUN)**.

Quaker Eco-Witness (QEW) will promote US government and corporate policies to help restore and protect Earth's biological integrity. It will work within and through the Religious Society of Friends for policies that enable human communities to relate in mutually enhancing ways to the ecosystems of which they are a part. This witness will seek to be guided by the Spirit and grounded in reverence for Earth's communities of life as God's creation.

QEB's purpose is to inform the **QEW** network to advance Friends' witness on government and corporate policy as it relates to the ecosystems that sustains us. Each issue is an article about timely legislative or corporate policy issues affecting our society's relationship to the earth.

Friends are invited to contact us about writing an article for *QEB*. Submissions are subject to editing and should:

- Provide background information that reflects the complexity of the issue and is respectful toward other points of view.
- Explain why the issue is a Friends' concern.
- Describe the positions of other faith-based and secular environmental groups on the issue.
- Relate the issue to legislation or corporate policy.
- Provide sources for additional information.

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Contributions are welcome.

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