

Seal the Deal

Mercy Global Concern Information Sheet - October 2009

When World Leaders gathered at the UN recently to look at some of the pressing issues of our time and to take part in the Climate Change debate, Non- Governmental Groups (NGOs) such as Mercy Global Concern are working hard to alert membership on some startling facts which have just emerged.

Did you know that:

- There are now 6.8 billion people now living on Planet Earth and that together we consume 1.4 Earths' worth of resources per year.
- If everyone consumed like Americans, we would need 5.4 Earths to sustain us.
- If Americans consumed like the British we would need 3.1
- South Africans 1.4
- Argentines 1.2
- Indians .4

The statistics are in and although our numbers have become immense, we are not spread evenly across the face of the planet.

- There are now 6.8 billion people which is a doubling since the 1960s and four times as many as just a century ago. As a result, more and more places are over-crowded, especially cities along the coastline...
- The human population continues to grow by 200,000 people every day and with more than one billion teenagers in the world today now reaching their most fertile years, we can now expect this number to rise in the decades to come. The latest UN projections have the global population reaching 9.2 billion by the middle of this century.
- We also know that humanity is on the move as never before. More than 3% of the Global Population - more than 200 million people - live outside their country of birth, and uncounted millions more have moved, or been moved, within their own borders. A great deal of this movement is forced, either by economic pressures or, increasingly, by damage to the environment or human conflict or by both.

Exploding Populations

1. Asia will continue to have the largest share of humanity in 2050. India and China already have populations of over one billion.
2. Africa - Although Africa struggles with high mortality rates, the continent is home to 8 of the top 10 countries in terms of fertility rates.
3. Latin America - Growth in this region has slowed due to dramatically reduced fertility rates over the past 30 years and increased emigration.
4. Europe - Currently Europe is experiencing population decline, and many countries in Europe will be smaller by 2050 than they are today.
5. North America - While growing at a smaller rate, North America's population is projected to keep going up, due in large part to immigration.
6. Australia and Oceania - projected to be modest in coming decades. Australia's growth is likely to come from immigration from developing nations.

Environmental Changes Drive Movement

Scientists and policymakers have warned that environmental degradation and global climate change could cause massive displacement of populations some day. For millions of our fellow humans, driven from their homes by melting permafrost, increased coastal flooding, or desertification of once arable land, that day has arrived.

Hard numbers are elusive, but an estimated 25 million people are environmental "refugees" (officially that word is reserved for those fleeing armed conflict). By 2050, that number could jump to 200 million. Climate change is projected to increase aridity in already dry areas and to spur more extreme rainfall and flooding events such as the one that displaced more than 2 million people in the Indian state of Bihar in 2008. Perhaps even more alarming is that even modest sea-level rise will wash away the homes and fertile fields of millions more.

Hot Spots of Global Change

Bangladesh

Low-lying Bangladesh foretells the future of climate refugees. Because roughly half of the country lies less than 10 metres (33 ft) above sea level, it has been flooding more frequently as glacial melt in the Himalaya. Tropical cyclone activity is also likely to rise in the near future, swelling the Padma (Ganges). Climate refugees already account for more than a third of recent refugees to Dhaka, the capital. Nearly 80% of the nation's legal disputes are triggered by legal disputes over land erosion.

Gobi, China.

The Gobi desert is expanding more than 10,000 square kilometers (3,861 square miles) a year due to over-plowing and over grazing. This expansion has already forced migration and threatens thousands more villages in the Chinese province of Gansu and the autonomous regions of Inner Mongolia and Ningxia Huzu. China's sheep, goat and cattle populations tripled from 1950 -2002, taking a heavy toll on soil quality. Overgrazing by these animals and an increase in tilled land has allowed the desert to expand. In Gansu Province alone an estimated 4,000 villages are at risk of being buried with sand.

Alaska, USA

Global temperature increases are affecting the lives of hundreds of villagers in Alaska who have been - or will be forced to move. Northern parts of the state have experienced a temperature increase of 3 C (5.4) in recent decades, causing ice and permafrost to thaw. Thawing permafrost is compromising housing foundations. Sheet ice melting allows rivers to migrate toward villages and increases water levels. Loss of protective sea ice means higher tides, storm surges, and erosion for coastal villages, particularly those on barrier islands.

Tuvalu

This low lying Pacific Island nation is extremely vulnerable to sea-level rise. As the strength of tropical storms have intensified, waves have threatened many homes. Salt water inundation, caused by rising tides, has already affected taro pits, where the island staple is grown. An increase in tropical diseases is predicted due to warmer temperatures and greater areas of standing water. Although a total submersion of Tuvalu would require melting of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets, the government had begun to explore options for population relocation.

Haiti

Deforestation and related soil degradation have led many Haitians to flee their country for the Dominican Republic or the United States.

Deforestation compromises two of Haiti's primary necessities: subsistence agriculture and wood-fueled energy. Increased tropical storm activity further fuels environmental migration. In the Summer of 2008, Haiti was hit by three major storms, killing more than 500 people and leaving as many as one million homeless. With the lowest GDP per capita in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti is scarcely able to react to these crises.