

Documents from the Mexico City meeting

We publish here excerpts from major speeches at the International Conference on Population. With the exception of the presentation by the Vatican spokesman, each of them is an apology for Malthusianism.

'A struggle for scarce resources'

Rafael Salas, director of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and Secretary-General of the Mexico City International Conference on Population, gave this address on Aug. 6, the opening day of the conference:

. . . Rapid population growth during the past three decades has led to the renewed perception that an equilibrium between population and the life-support systems has to be achieved. . . .

Of the several global issues that beset mankind today, it is only in population where national effort and international co-operation has had some success in attaining an agreed global objective: the moderation of the global population growth rate. . . . The global population growth rate has declined. Several countries have demonstrated that national population policies and programs can indeed be effective in reducing the rates of fertility. . . .

One factor that has often been overlooked is the link between population and global security and the role which population plays in shaping political behavior. Although population pressure by itself does not necessarily cause conflict, in combination with other economic, political, and social factors, it can be critical; as a struggle for scarce resources very often intensifies with the increased number of people involved. Population policies and programs, by looking towards a moderation of population growth and a rational spatial distribution of population, thus represent humane efforts to reduce imbalances and disparities that lead to crises. . . .

Population growth is the critical factor—to be considered in relation to an equally critical factor, the life-support systems of this planet. Population should be viewed in its entirety—as a resource, as a constraint, as a consequence, as a determinant and as an integral element of life. . . .

The World Bank program

The following are excerpts from the speech given on Aug. 7 by A. W. Clausen, president of the World Bank:

. . . The evidence is overwhelming that rapid population

growth impedes efforts to raise living standards in most of the developing world. There must therefore be a continuing effort to contain population growth if pervasive poverty is to be eased and development accelerated. . . .

The economic dialogue which the World Bank conducts with its borrowing member countries is the linchpin of its lending program. In it we are giving increasing attention to the consequences of rapid population growth. Those consequences vary, depending on the institutional, economic, cultural, and demographic setting. But most countries find that rapid population growth makes the choice between higher consumption now and the investment needed for higher consumption in the future very stark indeed. They face the pressing problem of large increases in their labor forces, alarming overcrowding of their cities, strains on basic services, and the threat to an already precarious balance between limited natural resources and a growing population. Technical change may bring some alleviation. But such change is neither free nor predictable. . . .

With the increase in demand, and with the continuing development of effective approaches to family planning, we have concluded in our World Development Report that population assistance could usefully triple, or even quadruple, between now and the end of the century. Population assistance is now about \$500 million annually—less than 2% of official development aid. Yet this small effort supports about 25% of all family-planning costs in developing countries, and about 50% of family-planning programs outside China.

A quadrupling of population assistance in real terms could



A. W. Clausen, the World Bank president, demands a quadrupling of funds for population control. Behind his pious-sounding rationalizations is a fanatical rejection of the high-technology development projects which alone can make economic progress possible in the Third World.

raise the level to some \$2 billion per annum by the year 2000. Even such a relatively small volume of donor assistance could, given effective policies in developing countries, make a vast difference to population growth, to maternal and child health, and thus to the future we share. . . .

If we can make that commitment here in this forum—making the slowing of population growth the priority that it surely is—we shall have taken a giant step towards more rapid economic and social development in the developing world.

The Heads of State suicide pact

Eighteen nations, many of them British Commonwealth countries, released a “Heads of State Declaration for Population Stabilization” at the Mexico City conference. The signatories are: Malta, Barbados, Tunisia, Jordan, Cyprus, Kenya, Palau, Jamaica, Tonga, Nepal, Iceland, Mauritius, St. Lucia/West Indies, Zimbabwe, Seychelles, Dominica, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

Mankind has many challenges: to obtain a lasting peace between nations; to preserve the quality of the environment; to conserve natural resources at a sustainable level; to advance the economic and social progress of the less developed nations; and to stabilize population growth. . . .

Degradation of the world’s environment, income inequality, and the potential for conflict exist today because of over-consumption and over-population. If this unprecedented population growth continues, future generations of children will not have adequate food, housing, medical care, education, earth resources, and employment opportunities.

We believe that the time has come now to recognize the worldwide necessity to stop population growth within the near future and for each country to adopt the necessary policies and programs to do so, consistent with its own culture and aspirations. . . .

‘Africa needs population reduction’

E. M. West, the deputy director-general of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), gave the speech which we excerpt here, calling for population control to deal with Africa’s food crisis. The FAO, along with the U.N. Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), has just published a study calling for “a Malthusian approach” to food and population problems.

. . . Population growth—in some countries as high as 4% a year—is outrunning growth in domestic food production in Africa. And, since there are indications that the rate of population growth may accelerate, the gap between production and demand may well widen even further in the next few years. . . .

Imbalance between population and food supply endangers food security in all its aspects, including stability of supplies and access to food, especially on the part of the poor.

The pressure of population leads to over-exploitation of land resources, cultivation of marginal lands, soil erosion, deforestation, and over-grazing. Instability in food supplies is aggravated, as fragile soils accentuate weather-induced variations in production. . . .

The Vatican dissents

The head of the Holy See’s delegation to the conference, Bishop Jan Schotte, rejected the arguments of the Malthusians and demanded an economic development program for the Third World:

. . . The “Recommendations for the Further Implementation of the World Population Plan of Action” [drawn up at the Bucharest Population Conference in 1974—ed.] the basis for solving population problems is socio-economic transformation, and that population policies should be part of overall policies of socio-economic development, and not a substitute for them. . . .

Socio-economic development is intended to broaden the basis for an equitable sharing and appropriate enjoyment of material goods. Scientific and technological progress should find new ways to make it possible for increasing numbers of people not simply to survive, but to live together in dignity, in social unity, harmony, and in peace. This requires international cooperation, particularly in economic affairs, in technology, in dialogue among nations, in constantly searching for and discovering new ways to ensure development and progress for all. To see all progress as dependent on a decline in population growth betokens a shortness of vision and a failure of nerve, and it often results in policies or initiatives that violate human dignity and threaten the common good. On the contrary, in the light of the great disparities between rich and poor, it is a challenge to the global community to pursue social justice and to find new ways to accelerate the process of development, to assist all nations in developing their resources—human and material—and to develop an appropriate international economic system that is open to all nations and enables all to participate freely and equitably, with due regard for cultural traditions and differences.

The Holy See expresses its concern about the setting of quantitative population growth targets. There is always the danger that the achievement of such targets, especially in terms of declines in population growth and/or fertility rates, will be used as a condition for economic assistance. Bilateral or multilateral economic aid for the advancement of peoples should never be conditioned on a demonstrated decline in birth rates, nor depend on participation in family planning programs.