

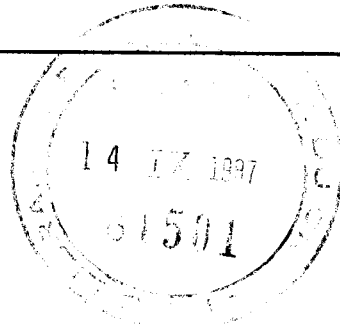
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WORLD POPULATION JUMPS TO FIVE BILLION



CBC: By the end of this week the population of the planet will reach five billion. Now whoever the five billionth person is he or she is already becoming a symbol for those who are concerned about global overpopulation. Joining me in Ottawa now is Ivan Head. He's the president of the International Research Development Center. That's a public corporation that supports scientific and technical research in developing countries. Good morning Mr. Head.

HEAD: Good morning.

CBC: Now at your center, the IRDC, you've got a clock that's actually counting up the number of people who are in the world right now and we're told that by the end of this week it's going to reach five billion. When exactly is that going to happen?

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HEAD: I'm told it will take place approximately quarter past ten on Saturday morning next. It's a computer programmed clock which takes into account actual births and actual deaths as best as those who predict these things can do. So it'll be Saturday morning.

CBC: So, are you going to be having some kind of a party or celebration?

HEAD: No, but we've invited the public into the lobby of the building to take a look at this. It's a public building in any event, but we think that it's an event of some consequence and therefore all that have an opportunity to look at it might keep it in mind.

CBC: So there'll be some people there watching that clock turn over, see the five followed by all of those zeros.

HEAD: That's right, the nines will all switch to zeros.

CBC: Now, when we're talking about that kind of number, we're talking about a whole bunch of nines and a whole bunch of zeros, the arithmetic of it is pretty overwhelming. Without sort of crushing us with all of those numbers and statistics, can you tell me what actually that means, when there are five billion people on the earth?

HEAD: It means a number of things but the worst thing is that if we start to presume that this is simply statistics, if we look at a clock and determine that all that is happening is that people are being born of a fashion that one can predict on a piece of paper, or on a clock on the wall. Each one of these is an individual human being. Each one of them should be entitled to the same kind of life, of creature comforts, of a modicum of happiness that we expect for our own children and that's going to be denied to them in many, many instances because of the pressures on the resources on this planet, and our inability still adequately to disperse those resources. We know that in many parts of the world the resources available are greater than the demands upon them. But elsewhere that's not the case, so the five billionth person really means a great challenge to us all to organize our affairs on this planet to a much greater, much more efficient degree than is now the case.

CBC: Part of the urgency of that figure too, five billion, is that things are increasing at a faster and faster rate. I mean, you know, it was only in 1830 that the first billion population happened in the world and that number has been accelerating consistantly since then.

HEAD: Yes indeed. The experts count the doubling time. If one knew what the population of the world was at the time of the birth of the Christ it took almost 1500 years for that number to double. This most recent doubling has taken

place in thirty years. The population, the net population is increasing nowadays at about 220,000 every 24 hours. On an annual basis that means that there is a new Bangladesh being created every single year and this trend will continue up until the turn of the century and a bit beyond.

CBC: That's staggering. That's staggering.

HEAD: Yes.

CBC: By the turn of the century I guess there's going to be six billion people so that the clock will go around once again then?

HEAD: I should think it would, but combined with this and a worrisome factor, is that the amount of land available to grow food is reducing at the same pace, and so in our building in Ottawa we have a second digital readout. This indicates the amount of arable land. It's decreasing. Not nearly so rapidly as the population is going up, but nevertheless coming down at a rate of about 1500 acres every 24 hours. This is a result of a lot of things. In the developing countries desertification, too many people trying to exist on soil that's not adequate for the purposes. In countries such as ours of course, paving over some of the most productive agricultural land and creating parking lots and shopping centers.

CBC: Now, Mr. Head, your job takes you to a lot of

the developing countries in the world, and maybe you can help us translate those stats into some kind of visual reality. What is it like when you go to parts of the third world and see the population increase expotentially almost and see the arable land decreasing?

HEAD: It varies considerably from one part of the world to the other, as one would anticipate. I always endeavour to think of these things in terms of children because as the population increases the greater chunk of that increase will inevitably result in a younger population. By the year 2000 more than 50 percent of the people alive on this globe will be under 25 years of age. In Asia, where happily in many countries the economics of the national governments have permitted better education than say in Africa, one sees children at recess in the earliest part of the morning, one of my first recollections of being in Asia when I was in the foreign service a long time ago, while driving to work before eight in the morning, was to watch children at recess because there were going to be three separate shifts of children at that particular school in the course of a single day. That's good organization to permit that to happen.

CBC: It's one way of dealing with the fact that the population is running rampant.

HEAD: Indeed. In all too many parts of the world of course schools simply don't exist, so whether there are two or three shifts is indifferent, whether the numbers available

for that number of shifts is indifferent. In many parts of Africa of course, children at age six, when our own children here in this country are expecting to be able to laugh and to enjoy themselves and to play for much of the day, children there are already heavily burdened with responsibilities. If one is a girl one is looking after one's own younger brothers and sisters, totally looking after them because mother is absent working in the fields, father may not be known to them. If you're a boy you're likely looking after the cattle and this is a major task to herd cattle or goats. In Latin America, unfortunately, in the major cities it may mean that you're abandoned without any recourse to an adult life at all. It's a scene straight out of Dickens in some of the larger South American cities to see these little children in the middle of the street relying on passersby as they beg for their entire sustenance, and that's a very tragic situation.

CBC: It's interesting Mr. Head, that you should mention cities, because the problem here is not just the fact that the population of the world is expanding, but that that population is moving increasingly off of land and into those cities where the social problems are almost inconceivably.

HEAD: Increasingly so. As we see television snippets of life in the large South American cities in particular one wonders why anyone would move in from the countryside to subject themselves to that kind of deprivation, but in the minds of those persons in the rural areas the city promises big things, just as it does for some in Canada, of course. Some modicum of social

service delivery, some access to water, to shelter, a possibility of earning some money, and so in they come, and the cities are growing apace. By the year 2000 more than half the population of the world will be in large cities... in cities, and some of them very large indeed. Forty-five of the sixty largest cities in the world will be in the developing`countries, and of course Mexico City is now projected to have a population greater than that of the entire country of Canada by the year 2000.

CBC: And the pace of this kind of change is accelerating as well, so that we're going to be seeing a world that no one can almost conceive of right now in just a few years time.

HEAD: Very much so. As the population increases the pressure for social services in the city and therefore the pressures on governments increases. In the rural areas, in the country side, the pressure to grow more food is there and this often means cutting down trees which is a very dangerous pursuit. At the present time it is estimated that of every ten trees cut down in the developing world only one is replaced, and in Africa this factor is 29 to one. At the rate one understands well why the desert is increasing.

CBC: Now, that's a pretty bleak scenario Mr. Head. A lot of people though think that this scenario need not necessarily be so bleak, that in fact the world is not only capable of supporting the five billion people

who are now on it, but supporting a significantly larger population. And I know that in say a hundred years time the population of the world might be ten billion people and some people think that we could support that, that number. Do you think so?

HEAD: I don't think it will get up that high, but I'm certainly one of those who agrees that the world can support a greater population than is now the case. Human beings, after all, represent an immense resource. This is an intellectual resource that can contribute, that can increase our own economic wellbeing, can write symphonies, can paint pictures, and we know that this is possible. We know it from our own history, from the middle ages of Europe where life was every bit as desperate as it now is in the developing countries. But a number of things have to happen in order to make that transformation. One of course is an awareness on the part of people, both North and South, that there is a problem under present circumstances. Secondly, one has to encourage greater education in the way in which we deal and cope with these problems. And thirdly, one then has to reorganize some governmental programs in order to make it all possible. But we have had remarkable successes in the past few years since the whole development program of so many industrialized countries swung into action to assist the developing countries. Life expectancy in those poorer countries has increased by one third and of course this has been one of the contributions to the greater population. But infant mortality has dropped by one half. Cereal grain production has gone up two and a half times. All of these things are possible,

but we can't let up now.

CBC: Well, these are all very hopeful signs. One of the things that people always have to talk about when they talk about population development is population control and one of the major aspects of that is family planning programs. How successful have they been, and maybe you can point to a country or two in which they've been very successful.

HEAD: Yes, they have in certain places, but it's a mindset rather than authoritarian stricture that permits these things to be successful. In China, which is an example of a country that by its very organization permits rather strong statements to be made and ensure that they're carried out, population... the increase of population growth has dropped off considerably, but there now seems to be some evidence that as the economy of China is starting to burgeon that these messages are not as well accepted by the people in the countryside. What one must look to is a model such as Thailand where it has been expressed by understanding governments to comprehending populations why it is in everyone's interest that family size be controlled. Some observers have said that over the years in Europe, in centuries past, in North America in a century past, we have gone through three separate phases. One where life expectancies were low because of the harshness of the way in which we lived, and where both birth rates and death rates were very high, keeping themselves in balance, into a second phase where increased availability of medical services, better nutrition and the like allowed the life expectancies to increase

while birth rates remained high. It was only when we got into the third phase as we now are circling in Canada, Europe and most of the industrialized countries that the two tend to balance off. But until parents recognize that their children are likely to survive them, are able to provide them with their old age assurance, they're not likely going to decrease family size. It's an educational program and a country such as Thailand has done a wonderful job.

CBC: So the issue becomes in that educational program
 how to make this kind of a global issue very real
on a family, personal level.

HEAD: Yes, indeed, and it has to be understood in the
 northern countries as well, that it's in our interest...
this is a planetary issue, now simply one of a comfortable life
here and unfortunately less than comfortable life elsewhere. What
is happening in the developing countries affect us very much indeed.
If those forests are being cut down, if the climate is being disturbed
in those countries it's a world wide, planetary kind of climate.
If disasterous diseases are raging or can rage out of control in
those countries, that infection spreads across boundaries. If
the economies of these countries, because of pressures and organization
which is not adequate, start to drop, then we lose export markets
and this is actually happening now. It's been estimated that in
the United States more than 200,000 jobs have been lost because
of the downturn in the economies of the Latin American countries
alone. This is a mighty spurt of protectionism, which of course

affects Canada. One step removed, but affects us nevertheless.

CBC: What are some of the other effects on Canada?

I mean, we think of this country as a vast open space and the population question or problem seems very far away, but what can an average Canadian do about this kind of question?

HEAD: First of all, become aware of it, I think, encourage his own government and the Canadian government now as in the past has been very much aware of these things, but needs, I think, greater understanding on the part of the population as a whole of the importance of it, that there are no planetary boundaries, any more, that our economy, dependent as it is on exports, requires a burgeoning growth economy in the developing countries that our health in terms of disease control, our environment, and in fact our political stability because of the likely turmoil that takes place in countries where all seems to be lost, all of these things are interknit, one with the other. And so any Canadian government needs assurance from its own populations that people are aware of these things, understand them and support the government in its efforts to assist the developing countries through a broad range of measures. Development assistance is only one of them of course. Entry into Canada of exports from these other countries is a very important aspect. If those countries are not able to provide jobs to their own increasing population, are not able to export those goods into countries such as ours, in order to earn the foreign exchange to buy our products to pay the debts owing

to our banks, then we're all going to suffer together.

CBC: Well, it's obviously an issue which is global
 but it has a great impact on this country as well.
Thank you Mr. Head for talking about it today.

HEAD: You're very welcome indeed, thank you.

CBC: Ivan Head is the president of the International
 Development Research Center in Ottawa.
