

World Human Population Now Totals 5.5 Thousand Millions

According to the 1992 revision of the *United Nations Population Estimates and Projections*, the World's human population totalled 5.5 thousand millions as of mid-1992. The current annual 1.7% growth-rate may decrease to 1% by AD 2025, but the overall total population is expected to grow to 8.5 thousand millions before levelling off.

Growth-rate Slowing

Growing at a rate of 1.7% per annum, the World's total population is projected to increase by 93 millions during 1992. By the end of the century, world population should have increased by nearly 750 millions (14%) to 6.2 thousand millions, and by AD 2025 the figure may reach 8.5 thousand millions. These increments are expected to occur even though the annual population growth-rate is projected to decline from the current 1.7% to only 1% by AD 2025.

These population figures are given in the recently-released 1992 revision of the official United Nations population estimates and projections, prepared by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Development. They provide the standard set of population figures used consistently throughout the United Nations system.

Less-developed Majority

Currently, 4.3 thousand million people — 78% of the world's population — live in the less-developed regions. The total population size in the more developed regions is 1.2 thousand millions — 22% of the world's population. The average annual population growth-rate is about 0.5% in the more developed regions and 2% in the less-developed regions.

Projections suggest that the population of the more-developed regions will increase by 179 millions between AD 1992 and 2025, whereas the population of the less-developed regions is expected to increase nearly 16 times as much — by some 2.8 thousand millions. In the year 2025, it is expected that 1.4 thousand million people will live in the more-developed regions and 7.1 thousand millions in the less developed.

As a result of differences in projected growth, the distribution of the population among the world's regions is expected to continue to change. Europe's share — 9% of global population in 1992 — is projected to decline to 6% by AD 2025. Northern America and all the republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States are expected to decline from 5% of world population in 1992 to 4% by AD 2025.

Africa, which currently accounts for 12% of world population, may reach 19% by AD 2025. By then, the continent's population may have more than doubled in

size. The countries of Latin America are expected to remain at about 8% of the world's population during the period 1992–2025. The percentage of total population living in Asia is expected to change slightly — 59% in 1992 and 58% by AD 2025. Within Asia, however, China's share should continue to decline — from 22% in 1992 to 18% in AD 2025. India's population, which accounts for 16% of the world's total in 1992, is expected to retain its share in the year 2025.

World Rankings Changed

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has altered the ranking in population-size of the 10 largest countries in the world. The United States, which had been fourth in 1990 — after the Soviet Union — is now the third-largest, following China and India. The Russian Federation, the largest republic in the area of the former Soviet Union, is now the sixth-largest country of all. Six of the 10 largest countries are in Asia (China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Japan, and Bangladesh), one is in Latin America (Brazil), and one in Africa (Nigeria).

The results of these projections will be published very soon in the form of a wall-chart and a set of technical publications that will be available from the Population Division of the UN's Department of Economic and Social Development. These reports incorporate the results of the latest rounds of national censuses and surveys as well as the most recent data from national civil registration systems. Demographic estimates are provided for all countries and regions for the period 1950–90; and projections with various assumptions of future fertility, mortality, and migration, are available for the years 1990–2025.

In addition to incorporating new data which have latterly become available, the 1992 revision takes into account demographic changes that have resulted from extraordinary events during the past two years. Most notable is the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Estimates of international migration had to be revised for a large number of countries to take into account the new and extensive migratory movements within and to Europe (from the former Soviet Union to Israel and elsewhere), the unprecedented growth of refugees in Africa and other continents, and population movements due to the Persian Gulf crisis. In addition, the potential demographic impact on population growth of the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) pandemic has been figured-in for the 15 highest-prevalence countries.

INFORMATION SERVICE
United Nations Office at Geneva
Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland.

Alarming Soil Degradation Around the World Revealed by Latest Data

A recent global assessment of soil conditions reveals that 1.2 thousand million hectares (more than 3 thousand million acres) of land — an area roughly the size of China and India combined — have become seriously degraded since World War II, according to *World Resources*

1992–93, a comprehensive global-data report published by the World Resources Institute (address below). The study estimates that, in the past 45 years, about 11% (*cf.* Table I) of the Earth's vegetated land-surface has become degraded through human intervention to the point that