



## **Launch of *World Watch* Magazine's Population Issue**

**Tuesday, September 30, 2008**

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

### ***Edited Transcript—Sean Peoples***

Good afternoon. I'm usually on the other end of these, so it's good to be here. I thank Geoff and my own program, the Environmental Change and Security Program, for allowing me to present, and also Tom at *World Watch* for allowing Liz and I to be able to write this article. I think we had fun doing it.

So it's a great privilege to be a presenter on this panel. And I'd like to take a chance to acknowledge my co-author, Elizabeth Leahy, of Population Action International. Some of her work done on a report called *The Shape of Things to Come* at PAI was a big basis for a lot of the information that we gleaned and used to write this article in *World Watch* magazine. And so I think it's a really good sign that Worldwatch is focusing on population and its linkages between health, environment, urbanization, security, and the like.

I think it shows the importance of viewing these issues in a broader frame, observing how they are connected, and then employing strategies to address the challenges in an integrated fashion. Some of this integrated thinking I think we can see, and Bob has already mentioned it. And if you want to go back to Tod Preston's blog, recently he's also mentioned some of this thinking as well. Let's look at Defense Department's 2008 National Defense Strategy, which addresses population, resource energy, climatic and environmental stress as new security challenges.

And right now I'm going to pop up this slide here. This is General Michael Hayden, who's also been mentioned earlier by Bob, director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. He discussed demographic trends in April 2008. And he states, "Today there are 6.7 billion people sharing the planet. By mid-century the best estimates point to a world population of more than nine billion. Most of that growth is almost certain to occur in countries least able to sustain it. And that will likely create a situation that will fuel instability and extremism, not just in those areas but beyond them as well."



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Now, some populations are decreasing in age as well. And that situation poses its own threats and challenges, such as caring for larger elderly populations and shrinking labor forces. But I think what General Hayden is saying here, these remarks provide a good basis, a point of entry for these issues and their connections.

But to be sure, rapid population growth does not have a simple causal relationship with conflict. And to suggest so would fail to take into account additional aggravating factors, such as poverty, poor governance, competition over natural resources, and environmental degradation. So although the global population rate is slowing, the planet still nets 78 million people per year. And of the projected increase of nearly three billion people by 2050, more than 95 percent is likely to occur in less developed countries. This is the point that Tom pulled out from our article.

Fifty-seven percent of the world's people, including nearly all of Africa, live in countries where fertility rates are higher than replacement level. As we see, the disparity in growth here -- I'm looking at the constant fertility variant and the median fertility variant on this slide -- this case the developing countries -- not many believe that constant fertility rate will become true, because fertility rates have come down. But the value in looking at this gap between constant and median variant is pretty big. I mean, you look at that and you see the need to prioritize comprehensive reproductive health services in less developed countries.

And so developing countries' fertility rates as a whole have dropped from six to three since 1965. However, the dramatic fertility declines occurring in Europe, East Asia, Latin America, have not all been universal. In Sub-Saharan Africa, these declines are hardly changing. Among 19 African countries that we have survey data available, fertility rates have stalled at four children per woman or higher.

And I have three illustrative population profiles here: Afghanistan, Japan, and the United States. The distribution of a country's population among various age groups can be described using population profiles. Various examples of age structures along the demographic transition, the shift from high mortality and fertility rates to longer lives and then smaller family size can be seen here.

The first Afghanistan example here -- this shape is much more classic pyramid shaped. And that's denoting a country at the beginning of the demographic transition. So youth, those aged zero to 29 years of age, make up approximately 67 percent of the total population in





countries like this, very young countries. At approximately 31 million people and a total fertility rate of 6.8, Afghanistan is slated to nearly triple its population by 2050.

Japan, on the other hand, has the oldest age structure in the world. Twenty-six percent of its population is older than age 60. And if fertility rates remain constant, the young people will increasingly make up a smaller share of the total population. And then finally here, the United States reached the end of the demographic transition with low mortality and fertility rates; however, replacement level fertility, 2.0, and immigration keep the population of the U.S. growing at about one percent per year, resulting in a relatively balanced age structure.

But what I really do want to do is focus in on the very young and youthful age structures, illustrated by Afghanistan. These countries with high levels of population growth generally have a large proportion of young people because they have or have recently had a preponderance of large families. High proportions of young people build significant population growth into a country's future.

Countries with very young and youthful age structures have also been linked to outbreaks of civil instability. One study found that countries in which youth make up 35 percent of the total adult population face a risk of conflict 150 percent greater than those in which the ratio is more balanced. In 2000, youth made up 35 percent or more of the adult population in 44 countries, including many in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Demographic trends are only one factor, though. I want to stress this. Many other factors are at play. Governments often face extreme challenges in providing education, well being and employment for young people. These countries with high rates of population growth often place increased strain on environment and social resources, threatening livelihoods as well as prospects for development. In addition, unless the annual rate of economic growth is able to significantly surpass the net increase in population size and is equitably distributed, per capita incomes will shrink.

This slide includes a graph taken from PAI's "Shape of Things to Come" report. It studies associations between conflict and age structure. And this breakdown of age structures were using very young, youthful, transitional, and mature. And as you can see, through 1970, '80, and '90, countries with a very young or youthful age structure were more prone to conflict when compared to transitional or mature age structures. Progress toward more balanced age structures occurs when health care improves, leading to lower mortality rates and longer life





expectancies, and when fertility rates fall, which happens when women and men have access to the services they need to choose their own family size.

And now looking at migration -- as we look at the demographic change and security issues, international migration is the factor worth more investigation. Although reliable data tracking such movements are notoriously spotty, international migration has more than doubled in the past 50 years, with about 191 million people in 2005 living in a country other than their origin. It's important to note there are many reasons for increases in migration, but the dramatic population growth of the past few decades, in its relationship with economic conditions, has been a big driver.

In many countries job prospects are limited. Migration provides significant benefits to migrant-sending countries, including remittances. We cited a figure -- and again Tom pulled this one out -- for remittances in developing countries from 2004 totaling \$145 billion. And migration is not always driven by personal economic motivation. Political and social upheaval and natural disasters -- sorry about that -- natural disasters have driven many to flee their homes merely to survive. And as of 2007, there were about 79 million refugees, internally displaced persons, or stateless persons worldwide. In such situations, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, and limited access to reproductive health care.

Now I want to move on to the demographic transition. So 42 percent of the world's people live in countries in which the average family size is below the number needed to maintain a stable population. These countries have reached the end of the demographic transition. So far 16 countries are losing population, all in Eastern Europe or Southeastern Europe, including Russia. However, while the countries with the highest rates of negative population growth could decline by a maximum of 15 percent by 2025, the most rapidly growing populations are likely to nearly double over the same two decades.

Dozens of countries in the developing world are still at the beginning of the demographic transition, with high fertility and a majority leading to an age structure much like the one we saw in Afghanistan. Recent research suggests that countries with more balanced age structures are generally both more democratic and more peaceful than those with skewed distributions. Countries at the beginning of the demographic transition, with more than two-thirds of their populations younger than age 30, had a nearly 90 percent probability of





autocratic or only partially democratic governance over the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

And in this slide I've included a profile from Mexico between 1975 and in 2005. And this is to illustrate the movement along the demographic transition. In 1975 Mexico maintained a classic pyramid shape, with nearly 73 percent of the population younger than 30. With investments in education as well as free family planning services, increased availability of health services led to a more balanced age structure. And as we can see in 2005, the lowest cohorts are definitely more balanced.

So as populations progress through this demographic transition, an opportunity for economic growth arises. It's known as the demographic dividend. Once death rates and birth rates decline due to investments in health, working age adults make up the greatest share of the total population. And this lower dependency ratio can lead to higher savings and wages, greater per capita spending on health and education at both the household and government level, and an increased participation of women in the labor force. These factors help boost national economies, as was the case with the Asian tigers in the 1970s and 1980s.

Benefits of the demographic dividend do not accrue automatically, however. Government policies and institutions are the link between demographic change and economic growth. Productive jobs must be available for the increasing number of entrants into the labor force. The financial sector must be efficient and reliable in order for savings and investment levels to increase. And high quality education must be widely available.

So, in conclusion, let's return back to General Hayden's remarks. It's encouraging to hear these broader demographic trends included in assessments of national security. However, the challenge is to avoid arm waving. These warnings can and should be channeled into positive action. Population trends do respond to wise policies and programs. Much opportunity to improve individual well being lies ahead if more countries achieve the more balanced age structures associated with higher levels of development; however, achieving those age structures will require continued improvements in contraceptive availability and use.

In countries that retain high population growth rates, policy should focus on expanding access to voluntary family planning and reproductive health services and on improving girls' education and income generating opportunities for women. In addition, investments must be





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made in educational and economic opportunities for increasing numbers of young people.  
Thank you very much. And I look forward to the discussion.



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