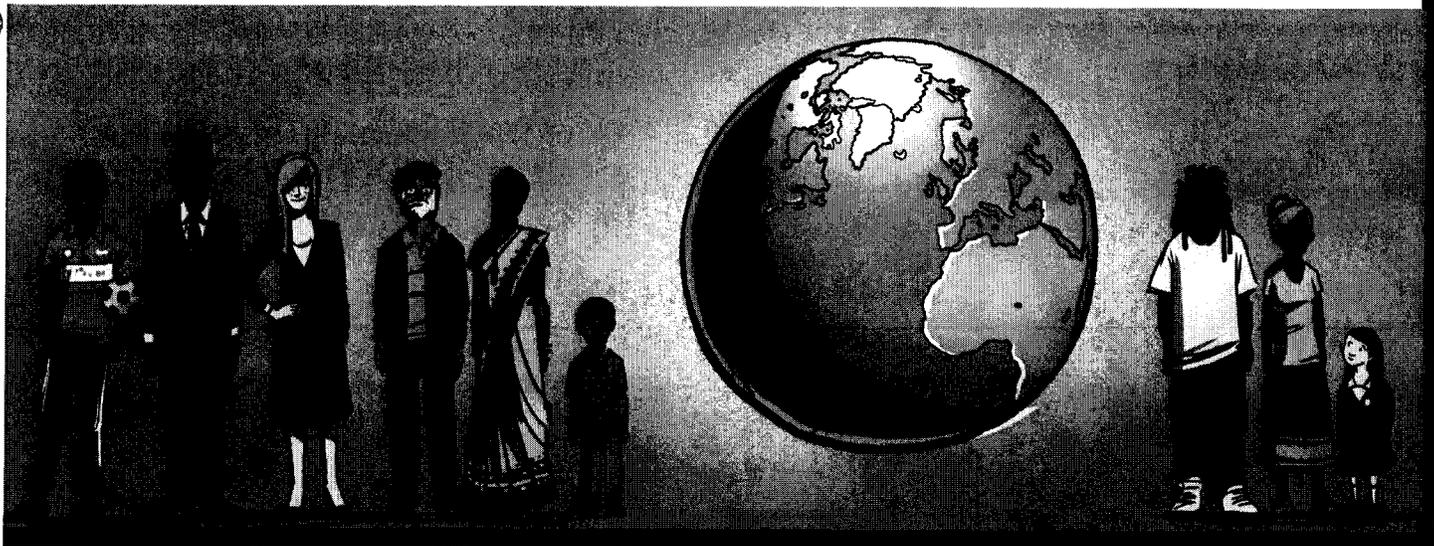




7 BILLION - AND COUNTING



You probably remember October 31, 2011. That was Halloween! But it was a special day for another reason, too. On that date, somewhere in the world, a baby was born. And according to a **United Nations (UN)** report, that infant brought the world's population to seven billion.

Seven billion people on our one small planet! It wasn't always this crowded on Earth. And depending on your point of view, it either has taken a long time to reach this landmark – or practically no time at all.

THE POPULATION TAKES OFF

About 2,000 years ago, there were only about 300 million of us. After 1,600 years, that figure doubled to around 600 million. Humans crossed the one-billion

mark in 1804. By the mid-20th century, the population had grown to about three billion.

Then, boom! Between 1950 and 2000, the world's population doubled to about six billion. And in the last 12 years alone, we've added another billion. Now, we're growing by about 200,000 people every day. That means there could be 10 billion of us by the end of this century.

What's behind this explosion? The UN report credits better medicine and health care. The impact of these improvements has been dramatic. In the 1950s, people lived to about 48. Now, the average **life expectancy** is 68. As well, fewer babies are dying at birth. And fewer children are dying from disease than ever before.

POPULATION BY NATION

The Pitcairn Islands in the South Pacific has just 48 people. It's the country with the smallest population. Here are the five top countries:

1. China – 1.4 billion
2. India – 1.2 billion (India will surpass China by 2030.)
3. United States – 313 million
4. Indonesia – 246 million
5. Brazil – 203 million

Canada's population – 34 million – ranks 37th.

DEPLETING RESOURCES

That's the good news. The bad news? The Earth's environment is in trouble. Our growing population is using up resources

DEFINITIONS

LIFE EXPECTANCY: the number of years that people are expected to live as determined by statistics

UNITED NATIONS: international body that most countries belong to, formed to promote peace, cooperation and security



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FOOD CRISIS

In today's world, there is enough food to go around, yet one out of every seven people goes to bed with an empty stomach.

Many of the world's hungry live in poorer nations. There, rising prices, climate change, economic troubles, and outdated farming techniques have reduced the food supply.

Disappearing farmland is another problem. In recent years, people in poor rural regions of the world have been moving to cities to look for work. The result? Food-producing farmland is being used up for housing.

The UN says this is a huge problem. To properly feed everyone, we'll have to increase food production by 70 percent within 40 years. That will require more farmland, not less.

faster than nature can replace them.

But are our exploding numbers entirely to blame? Not everyone thinks so. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, for one, says a bigger issue is the way we use and abuse those resources.

"[We have] plenty of food, but one billion people go hungry," he

said on the Day of Seven Billion. "Lavish lifestyles for a few, but poverty for too many others."

Renowned scientist Dr. David Suzuki agrees with that view. He points out that North Americans, Europeans, Japanese and Australians make up 20 percent of the world's population - but they use more than 80 percent of its resources. "We are . . . environmental predators [who] blame the problem on overpopulation," he states.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

Dr. Suzuki says that **climate change** is a major problem and that simply slowing the world's rate of population growth won't stop it. He notes that as people elsewhere try to live more like North Americans, environmental problems will get worse. The solution? We must use less, find cleaner energy sources, and help other countries develop in more **sustainable** ways.

CAUSE FOR HOPE

Still, most experts agree that the issue of population growth and climate change go hand-in-hand. That's because if we don't slow the growth in our numbers, we

face an even more uphill climb in trying to live sustainably.

And in that regard, there is cause for hope, because families are having fewer children. In 1950, there was an average of six children per family. Today that average has dropped sharply to 2.5. This slowdown means each family has more resources for food, health care and education.

Over the past 200 years, we've also seen big improvements in the way we feed, shelter and care for people everywhere. And if we work at it, we can keep improving conditions.

"We must increase the **probability** that every child born will be wanted, well cared-for and have decent prospects," said biologist and author Joel Cohen. "We must conserve more - and more wisely use - the energy, water, land, materials and biological diversity with which we are blessed." ★

DID YOU KNOW?

In the 10 minutes it has taken you to read this story, about 1,400 babies were born.

DEFINITIONS

CLIMATE CHANGE: a long-term change in the Earth's climate caused directly or indirectly by human activities, such as the overconsumption of natural resources
LAVISH: extravagant and profuse

PREDATORS: animals that survive by hunting, catching and eating other animals
PROBABILITY: likelihood
SUSTAINABLE: able to be maintained