

## **A Special Child**

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Demographers tell us that sometime in September or October, probably in Central India, a very special child will be born. The exact time and place will never be precisely known, and this Special Child's first tiny cry will not be heard beyond a hut or a village, but the event will be momentous – she will be the Seventh Billion Person in the world.

When this event happens, we here in the United States will be busy with our families, our jobs, our thoughts and opinions, our religious beliefs, and all of the factors that contribute to our daily lives and livelihoods. There may be some media news items about seven billion people now on our planet, but it will be of passing interest for most of us. That is tragic, because the birth of the Special Child should be a stark reminder of why our daily concerns are so closely linked to a rapidly expanding world.

Here in the United States we are already aware of some of the effects of massive world population growth, such as the need for increases in food production or how quickly a new disease can spread. We have even experienced some passing initial involvement with these concerns, such as higher food prices and worries about flu epidemics.

But for the countries and regions most affected by huge population increases, a “scarcity mentality” may begin to prevail, with the potential for internal strife and a coveting of what others have. For those less affected, like the United States, a “siege mentality” could be the result, with increased immigration barriers, a restrictive international trading climate, and continued internal polarization of political, economic and social beliefs.

These conditions are not as remote as we might think. Indeed, the Special Child's birth reminds us that with seven billion human beings, we are never far from the rest of the world. We know that global financial and market conditions affect our personal savings and daily costs. We also know all too well, the tragic costs of war, when competing interests and beliefs, fueled by population growth, result in military and terrorist attacks, counter attacks and a spiraling escalation of hatred and distrust.

We urgently need to renew a lost focus on the challenges and consequences of continued world population growth. But at this time, here in the United States, we seem incapable of seeing the future beyond short term political and philosophical differences. The recent crisis of debt and deficit is a good example, and famine in Africa seems far away. Indeed, we appear to have devolved to a social and political mindset that seemingly prizes partisan political power; that appears to idolize intransience in ideology; that conveniently consents to corporate control, and seems to revel in a rigidity in religion that can contradict the concept of a loving God.

This is not the way to face the challenges of the Special Child and her daughters and granddaughters, not with our leadership and our own national security at stake. As a nation, we need to develop policies and actions to contend with a rapidly expanding

world, or that world may be our downfall. There are many potential answers at hand; we know the positive factors that contribute to lower birth rates and consequent world stability, such as improved health and nutrition, and these can be addressed without intruding on personal values and beliefs. But national direction on this and other major issues must come forcefully from all of us to our leadership, and on this subject and many others, we must find a way to get along and find common ground.

We face a future of too many people and we must face it together. If not, the birth of the Special Child will portend a world of scarcity, insecurity, and strife – and we and our children will not be immune.

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