

Issues for the 1990s

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

■ World population as of mid-1992 stood at approximately 5.5 billion persons and it is estimated that it will reach 6 billion by 1998. Over the next decade, the annual increment will average about 97 million, the highest level ever. Almost all of this growth, 95 per cent, will take place in developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Approximately 83 per cent of the population growth during the next decade will occur in cities. This growth will result both from natural increase and from increasing flows of population from rural areas. At present there are 11 cities with more than 10 million inhabitants; seven of these are in developing countries. By the year 2000, there will be 21 cities with populations in excess of 10 million and 17 of these will be in developing countries.

It is estimated that approximately 70 million people, mostly from developing countries, are working, legally or illegally, in countries other

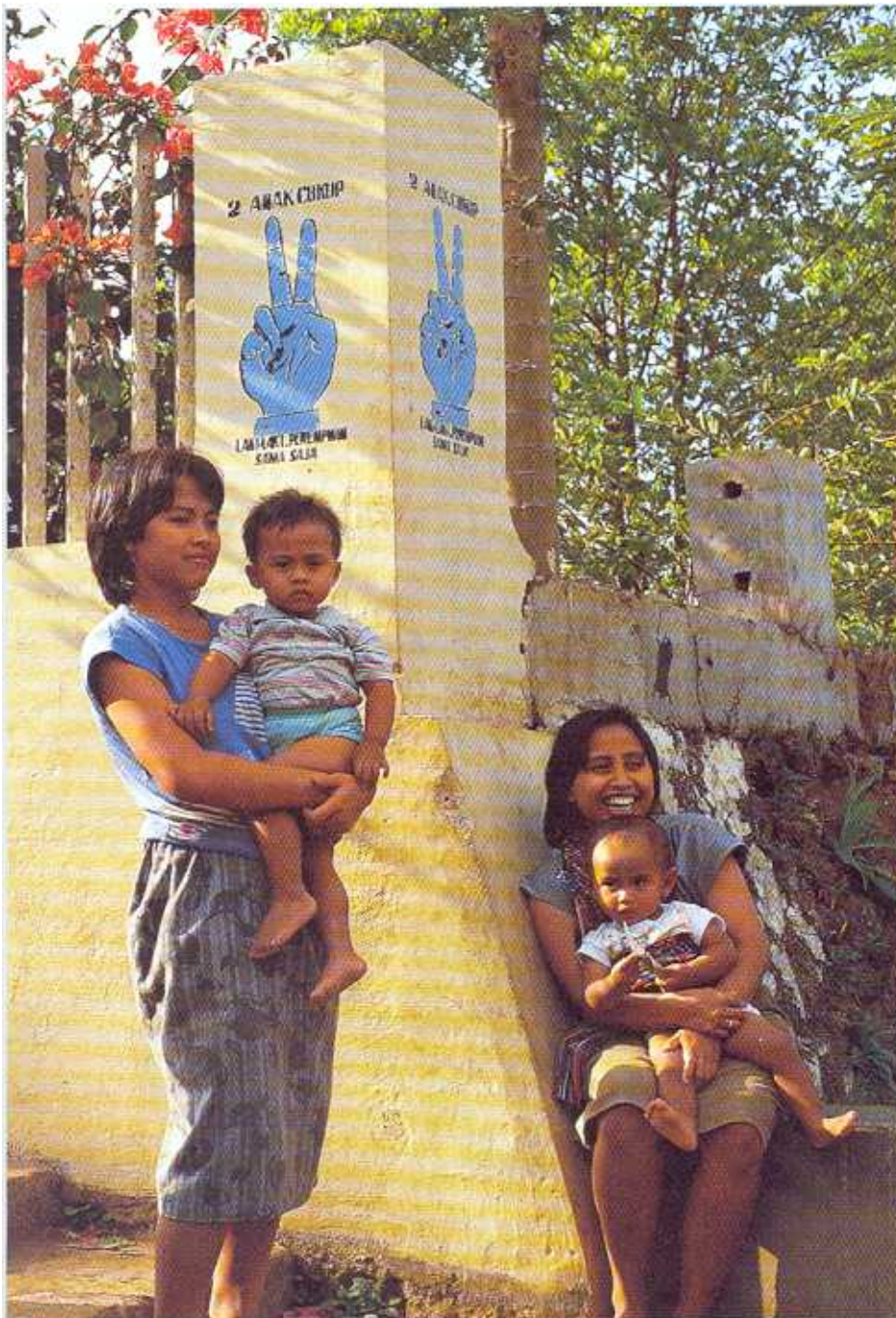
than their countries of origin. Each year over one million people permanently emigrate and close to that number seek asylum. The period from the mid-1970s to 1990 witnessed rapid growth in the number of refugees – from 2.8 million in 1976 to 17.3 million in 1990.

A recent UN survey of the world social situation shows that while the percentage of people living in poverty in developing countries fell from 52 per cent in 1970 to 44 per cent in 1985, the actual number living in absolute poverty increased from 944 million to 1.2 billion over the period. Poverty and population problems are closely linked. The highest rates of mortality, as well as population growth, are in poor countries and among poor people. If poverty reduction programmes are to be effective, they must address the issue of population growth and provide improved access to quality family planning and health services and to education.

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) highlighted the interrelationship between population and the environment. UNCED underscored that high rates of population growth and imbalances in population distribution often result in environmental degradation that constricts access to the natural resources necessary to maintain a basic standard of living. Environmental stress and the reduction of

For women to make choices about their lives their legal rights must be recognized and access to education, health care and employment expanded





For poverty programmes to be effective they must provide better access to quality family planning and health services

available natural resources translates into deprivation, particularly for those groups already living at the margin. The intensified focus on the environment has brought to the fore a number of equity issues, particularly with respect to consumption patterns between North and South, that will have to be addressed in the coming years.

International migration patterns as well as refugee movements are critical issues that the world community will have to address. It is essential that the dignity and human rights of those involved in such movements be guaranteed and observed.

Much remains to be done in order to

improve the situation of women. It is now widely acknowledged that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the full participation of both women and men in all aspects of productive and reproductive life. Thus, governments should ensure that gender specific data are collected and analyzed so that development strategies and policies can be assessed in terms of their impact on women.

Women's right to choice with respect to major decisions in their lives must be respected and facilitated. In order for this to occur, their rights before the law must be recognized and enforced and their access to education, to the resources of the household, to quality health care, to employment and to credit must be greatly expanded. In view of high levels of maternal mortality in many countries and patterns of female morbidity, governments should give priority to the adoption of measures to promote the health and nutrition of women and young girls. Reproductive freedom is key to the advancement of women. They must have access to information and to a range of safe and affordable contraceptive methods.

The results of several recent health and fertility surveys indicate a high demand for family planning. At present there is an urgent need for the development of safe and improved contraceptives for fertility regulation and for effective pharmaceutical products for protection against sexually transmitted diseases. Given the range of methods now available, emphasis should be given to the development of male methods. In the process of contraceptive research, development and introduction, it is essential that such processes are conducted with full respect for human rights. Contraceptive research and trials of new methods should be governed by accepted ethical principles and internationally recognized standards. In particular, new methods should be tested on a range of individuals in developed and developing countries who have full information and have freely agreed to participate in the testing.

The experience of UNFPA during the past 23 years has convincingly demonstrated the importance of addressing the moral and ethical dimensions of population and development issues. It has illustrated the need to focus on reproductive rights as basic human rights and on the need to implement development policies and programmes that are equitable and appropriate and that acknowledge the centrality of women as participants in the development process.

EXTRACT FROM: UNFPA and Human Rights issues, UN Ref No: A/CONF. 157/PC/61/Add. 9