

Conference for Youth of Population and Development:

PLANET WITHOUT A PLAN?

Lincoln Cathedral  
Great Britain

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Remarks by -

PERDITA HUSTON

NO PERSON IS AN ISLAND?

Your welcome is most gracious. I am very pleased to be here with you: speaking in this great cathedral is an honor I will long cherish, speaking about human relations in the crowded world of the future is vitally important and, speaking to an audience of the very people who will undertake those future relationships is a privilege and a challenge.

My colleagues here today have presented, most eloquently, many of the facts and figures of world population growth rates and, I agree with you, the statistics are startling.

But with your permission, I would like to take those figures one step further and sketch in the human dimensions of the statistics-- from an individual's perspective, first, then from a nation's viewpoint and, finally, from the global point of view: our universal concern for a peaceful common future.

But first of all, let us start with the recognition of the fact that, whether we like it or not --- and no matter what we do -- at the turn of the century, when you are in your mid-thirties -- Planet Earth will have half again as many people seeking " a decent life" living on it . From 4.5 billion human beings today, we will jump -- in a few short years --- to well over 6 billion. We also know that most of these two billion additional people will be born in nations the least able to sustain their numbers.

It is impossible to define the implications of this leap in the quantity of human beings -- on the earth's resources and environment; be it on the climate, the fresh waters, the oceans, forests and soils -- or on people: over-crowding, health needs, educational demands, employment and -- yes -- just plain dignity. We don't even know how many of our animal species are doomed by the new burdens placed on space and resources. Indeed, all conventional yardsticks are useless in our endeavor to measure or predict the results of these pressures.

The ONLY fact we can be sure of in all this is that --NOTHING THAT HAS GONE BEFORE --- no remedy devised in the past --- is relevant to the new situation. Solutions thought effective before become questionable if not entirely worthless as we see the new QUANTITY OF PEOPLE collide with the already delicate balance in the QUALITY OF LIFE.

The problem is, then, -- How must we re-arrange the world to relieve these new neighbors? We can't wish them away. It won't work.