



This year humanity is reaching a historical milestone. Before the year is finished, 7 billion human beings will be sharing this earth. On the 11 July, World Population Day, we should all as individuals stop for a moment and think about the significance of this remarkable fact.

The number 7 billion is a call for celebration. Human beings are living longer, more prosperous lives now than ever before. Globally, the average life expectancy during the years 2005-2010 reached an unprecedented high of 68 years. Compare this to the average life expectancy of 48 years in the years 1945-1950.

However, we all know that the world faces many problems connected to our ever increasing numbers. Even as the number of hungry people in the world as a proportion of the global population has fallen since 1990, the absolute number has increased from 815 million to 925 million due to global population growth. The world's environmental resources are increasingly being exhausted. Some of our most basic needs are therefore not met: worldwide about 884 million people have no access to safe drinking water. Moreover, 17,000 known species of plants and animals are in danger of extinction because of habitat loss, invasive species, high consumption rates, pollution and climate change.

Population growth also fuels inequality. In the area of health, huge achievements have been accomplished in the past decades, but many of the gains have favoured the very wealthy, while the very poor suffer from easily remedied ailments and diseases. And inequality continues to increase: according to the World Bank, the poorest 20 per cent of the world population only receives 1.5 percent of all income, while the richest 20 percent enjoys 77 percent of all income.

Many people are now facing up to the challenges of a population of 7 billion, but many are deprived of the possibility to do so. About 215 million women in the developing world would want family planning, but are unable to get it. It is estimated that this unmet demand for contraception is responsible for 82 percent of all unintended pregnancies globally. At the same time international assistance for family planning has fallen to US\$400 million per year worldwide, after a historical high of \$700 million in 2002.

Even though the problems are numerous, there are more people today to address them, and thanks to the communications revolution we have an unprecedented capacity to understand and face those challenges. Never before have there been so many young people in the world, more than 1.2 billion adolescents worldwide, and the future lies in their hands. In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, we have come to realize that our successes and troubles must be shared with the whole world. A child in Sub-Saharan Africa who has lost her parents to HIV/AIDS, a man who lost his home to the devastating Tsunami in Japan and a woman in North America subject to domestic violence, the problems facing these people are not theirs alone, but affect all of us directly or indirectly. Now, 7 billion strong, humanity has an unprecedented opportunity to create shared solutions.

Visit www.7billionactions.org to be part of it.