



state of world population 2007

Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth

27 June 2007

Dear Editor:

In 2008, for the first time in history, more than half of world population, 3.3 billion people, will be living in urban areas. By 2030, this is expected to swell to almost 5 billion. The population of towns and cities in developing countries is set to double in the space of a generation. Many of these new urbanites will be poor. Their future, the future of cities in developing countries, the future of humanity itself, all depend very much on decisions made *now*.

Most cities struggle to meet current needs. They are quite unprepared for the enormous scale and impact of future growth. *The State of World Population 2007* Report, from UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, looks beyond today's problems—real, urgent and poignant though they are. The Report, *Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*, calls for pre-emptive action to prepare for future urban growth.

Urbanization—the increase in the urban share of total population—is inevitable, but it can also be positive. No country in the industrial age has ever achieved significant economic growth without urbanization. Cities concentrate poverty, but they also represent poor people's best hope of escaping it. Cities create environmental problems, but they can also create solutions. Concentrating population in cities can contribute to long-term sustainability: The bigger threat may be disordered sprawl. The potential benefits of urbanization far outweigh the disadvantages. The challenge is learning how to exploit its possibilities.

This report looks at the demographic processes underlying urban growth and tries to grasp their policy implications. It examines the specific consequences for poverty reduction and sustainability. It recommends action that cities can take today, to ensure their viability tomorrow.

For the second consecutive year, UNFPA is introducing a youth supplement, *Growing Up Urban*, a companion to *The State of World Population 2007*. This supplement features the stories of young women and men growing up in cities of the developing world. I am confident that you will find both reports a valuable source of news stories, features and editorials in the months ahead. *The State of World Population 2007* and *Growing Up Urban* are under embargo until 12:00 GMT, 27 June 2007.

Sincerely,

Safiye Çağar

Director

Information, Executive Board and Resource Mobilization

United Nations Population Fund