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As global population nears 7 billion, UN capitalizes on new opportunities



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (left) and UN Population Fund chief Babatunde Osotimehin at launch of 7 Billion Actions Initiative

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With the world's population projected to top 7 billion next month, the United Nations today launched a global initiative – [7 Billion Actions](#) – bringing together governments, businesses, the media and individuals to confront the challenges and seize the opportunities offered by the milestone.

“We are not here simply to acknowledge that milestone. We are here to address all of its vast implications,” [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon [told](#) a panel discussion at the launch ceremony at UN Headquarters in New York.

“The seven billionth citizen will be born into a world of contradictions. We have plenty of food yet millions are still starving. We see luxurious lifestyles yet millions are impoverished. We have great opportunities for progress but also great obstacles,” he said, terming the campaign “a clarion call to people, communities, countries and our partners: non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, academics and faith leaders.”

Among challenges beyond grinding poverty and inequality, he cited discrimination, human rights abuses, lack of democracy, violence against women, maternal mortality, climate change and the degradation of the environment.

“These are all the challenges that we can and must overcome,” he said. “If we invest in people, we will reap the best dividends.”

The UN Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)), the agency responsible for 7 Billion Actions, noted the implications of the new milestone for sustainability, urbanization and migration in a world where conflicts and weather disasters are driving people from their homes and climate change is exacerbating food and water shortages.

At the same time, new media technology is enabling direct communications between people around the world, creating an unprecedented opportunity to build greater communities and share ideas across borders.

Asked what would happen in the worst-case scenario, if action was not taken now, UNFPA Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin said that the human spirit seeks to survive and he believes we will do our best to survive.

“But if indeed the worst-case scenario is what gets played out, and we have a population that suffers the great inequities that the Secretary-General talks about and continues to have those inequities, then we have this crisis around the world, the population, the food crisis, the water crisis, issues around migration, issues that deal with land, issues that deal with conflict,” he said.

“That I think we can avoid in many ways if we work with Member States, if we work at the international level to address all of these issues,” he added, summarizing the hopes of the 7 Billion Actions campaign.

Outlining the major actors in the initiative, UNFPA called on governments to show sound leadership in fostering research and technology to improve society, while businesses should use their influence to create economic returns in ways that also create value for society.

The media play a critical role in holding institutions accountable and providing solid information and analysis to build collective wisdom, while individuals must embrace their individual and collective capacity to change and improve the world.

According to the latest UN figures, the world’s population is projected to reach 7 billion on 31 October, surge past 9 billion before 2050 and then reach 10.1 billion by the end of the century if current fertility rates continue at expected levels.

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