

# The New Millenium: A World on the Brink

Despite a century of tremendous technological change and adaptation, profound scientific discoveries, and wars to eliminate everything from totalitarianism to poverty, great unrest remained around the world of the twenty-first century.

Some of the overarching problems of the new millenium relate to the numbers of people on the planet today. In some regions and continents, these include overpopulation and overcrowding, poverty and political unrest, all of which serve as ongoing challenges with alarming potentials.

Population predictions for the future are staggering. In 1750, the world's population stood at 750 million people. Two centuries later, the number was 2.5 billion. By 1970, the number was 50 percent larger at 3.7 billion. By the year 2000, the estimated population of the world approaches six billion. Questions concerning such figures relate to limited resources, increases in poverty, lack of clean water and arable land for farming, and population density.

(The good news regarding the growth of the population of the world is that the rate of growth in the 1990s is about one-third less than what it was even 30 years ago. Some experts project an even lower rate of growth for the first 20 years of the twenty-first century.)

In a world where technology brings people closer together through cellular phones, the Internet, satellite television, and personal computers, those people living today in poverty regions are more keenly aware of their lower economic status than any previous generation. These people—living in the poorest countries on Earth—those often referred to as the Third World—understand the differences in their lives and the lives of those living in the more industrialized nations of the West.

Many of these nonindustrialized nations are improving their standard of living but not fast enough to keep pace with the demands of greater

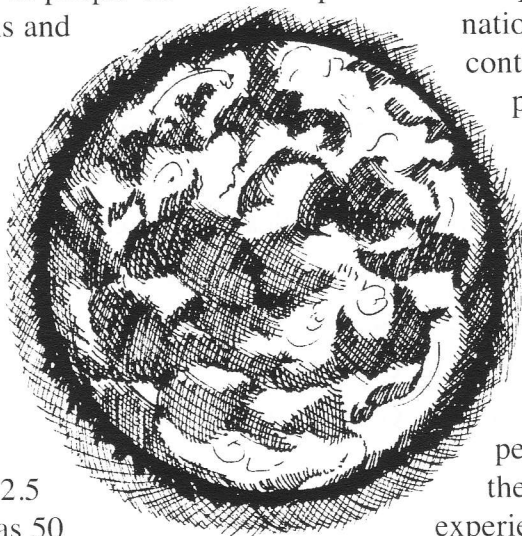
populations at home. Most of these countries produce raw materials which are sold to the industrial nations, yet much of the world's trade today takes place between industrialized nations, not between the Third World and the West.

This means that the raw materials trade does not provide an adequate economic base for Third World nations, and the cycle of poverty continues. Alongside poverty, the world's poorest people suffer from a lack of medical care, poor sanitation, and rampant disease, not to mention ongoing famines and hunger.

Crippling inflation continues to hamper economic growth. During the decade leading up to 1970,

India experienced a cost of living increase of 149 percent and over 200 percent in many African countries. At the same time, the nations of the West experience an almost constant rise in their standard of living.

What lies in the future for the people of planet Earth? What will be the nature of Western civilization for future generations of Europe, the U.S. and other nations? Such questions are unanswerable. One only hopes that the gap between the West and the Third World does not further widen, a circumstance which will only cause further widespread misery and despair, as well as regional jealousy and wars over resources. It remains in the hands of the generations now living and those yet to be born to answer these problems. Perhaps the greatest achievements and successes of humankind are yet to be explored and made known.



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## *Review and Write*

1. What do you feel is the greatest problem facing the world of the twenty-first century? Why do you think so?
2. How do you think the people of the twenty-first century solve their problems, both new and old?