

POPULATION CONNECTION

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**Thailand's Remarkable Family
Planning Accomplishments
and the Man Who's Largely
to Thank: "Mr. Condom"**





President's Note

Humans have been around for less than seven seconds, if we compare our planet's existence to a 24-hour day—*Homo sapiens* evolved less than 350,000 years ago, and the earth is about 4.5 billion years old.

Even though we just came on the scene, we act like undisputed rulers of the world—conveniently overlooking the fact that humans can be undone by infinitesimal viruses. We'd do well to remember that of nine known human species we're the last one left.

Each of us is a metaphorical biological RV since the typical person houses some 39 trillion microorganisms including bacteria, viruses, and fungi. A recent meme asserts that plants are actually farming us—not the other way around—since they provide oxygen so that, when we die and decompose, they can feed on our remains. Often, our elaborate funerary internments go to great lengths to disrupt this natural process.

Each day we trample this precious planet with utter disregard, even contempt, for immutable laws of nature. Given this folly, what are the odds our species will get to that eighth second by still being around in the year 50,000 CE?

To be sure, we're great at building stuff, be it useful or nonsensical. But at what cost? Over the past 50 years, human population has more than doubled while we've annihilated 69 percent of mammals, birds, fish, and reptiles during that brief period, according to the World Wildlife Fund.

In a best-case scenario, we might accelerate the use of renewable energy and stop using fossil fuels within decades. But will that curb our ravenous overconsumption? Or will we continue to treat the natural world as if it is disposable, when it's essential to life in all its forms—including our own recently evolved species?

Imagine for a moment a world with, say, just 12 percent of its current population—or one billion people. Would it be terrible if we shrunk to that level—or even lower—by choosing smaller families? It would take at least several centuries, during which life patterns would shift significantly, but there is nothing new about dramatic change.

We'd be back to where we were around 1800 in terms of our numbers, but with all people able to have immensely rich lives in the deepest sense of the word. What could be better than a world in which people everywhere could lead healthy, productive lives and enjoy the abundance of a flourishing natural world without recourse to heedless plunder?

As for the economy, markets would adapt just as they've adapted in the past. Keep in mind that the five biggest companies in the U.S. today didn't even exist 50 years ago. The largest one (Apple) is part of an industry that, for all practical purposes, came into existence around then. Change happens, regardless. But what sort? And at what cost?

Speaking of cost, achieving smaller families is about as inexpensive as it gets. According to the Guttmacher Institute, modest investments could slash unintended pregnancies in the poorest places on earth by 68 percent. Here at home, those in need of reproductive health services must navigate a bewildering array of programs. Even worse, many states are enacting ever more barriers to contraception and safe abortion at a time when there are about 1.4 million unintended births in the U.S. annually.

Only time will tell if our own species will have any staying power. By shrinking our numbers and respecting both the laws of nature and limits to growth, we might yet be able to stick around for a while and enjoy the simple abundance of life on this small planet.

John Seager
john@popconnect.org

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john@popconnect.org

Editor

Marian Starkey, MSc

marian@popconnect.org

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Population Connection

2120 L Street, NW, Suite 500

Washington, DC 20037

(202) 332-2200 • (800) 767-1956

info@popconnect.org

populationconnection.org

populationeducation.org

Features

16 'Captain Condom' Turned the Tide in Thailand's War on AIDS and Overpopulation

By Seth Mydans

24 International Conference on Family Planning

Photos by Nancy Gomes, Olivia Nater, and Yasmeeen Silva



Cover image: Mechai Viravaidya, founder of Thailand's Population and Community Development Association (PDA), best-known by the nickname "Mr. Condom," gives a speech at the International Conference on Family Planning in Pattaya City, Thailand, on November 14, 2022. (Photo by Nancy Gomes for Population Connection)

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Editor's Note

As I prepare to send this issue of the magazine to the printer, four of my colleagues and one of our board members are in Thailand at the International Conference on Family Planning. They are hosting an exhibit booth each day, talking with conference attendees from the United States and around the world about the health, social, and environmental benefits of voluntary family planning and about the role and responsibility that the U.S. has in expanding access to reproductive health care, including family planning and safe abortion, through progressive foreign assistance policies.

The conference is co-hosted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health, the Thailand Ministry of Health, the Royal Thai College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the Population and Community Development Association (PDA).

The founder of PDA, Mechai Viravaidya, is profiled in the feature article that begins on page 16. Mr. Condom, as Mr. Mechai is also known, has worked his entire professional life to slow population growth in Thailand through better access to voluntary family planning. Profits from his condom-themed restaurant and hotel chain, Cabbages & Condoms, help fund PDA. While they are in Thailand, our Population Connection contingent is staying at the Birds & Bees Resort, part of the Cabbages & Condoms enterprise. See page 24 for photos of the hotel and restaurant, our exhibit booth at the conference, and staff site visits to a teen center and a school participating in PDA's Partnership School Project.

In no small part thanks to Mr. Mechai, Thailand has made incredible progress in health and economic development since PDA's founding in 1974, as you'll see in Pop Facts on page 4. Due to its middle-income status, Thailand "graduated" from USAID assistance in 1995, although a regional program based in Bangkok works in Thailand and surrounding countries to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and emerging infectious diseases. UNFPA still spends about half a million dollars a year in Thailand on sexual and reproductive health services, programs to empower women and young people, and population and development activities.

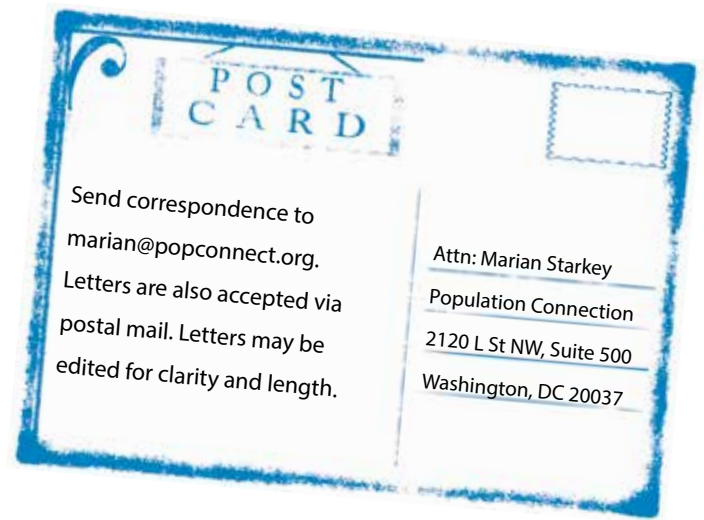
Thailand is sometimes compared to the Philippines as a sort of split test of what happens when two very similar countries (demographically speaking) take two very different family planning paths. Both countries had populations of around 40 million in 1974. Thailand made family planning a priority and now has a fertility rate of 1.32 births per woman and a population of 71.7 million. The Philippines, where the Catholic Church has blocked progressive family planning policy and public access to services for decades, has a fertility rate of 2.73 and a population of 115.6 million. There are vast differences in other health and development indicators as well, as you would imagine.

Family planning saves lives, reduces poverty, and helps to protect the environment where people live. The 4,000+ people attending the International Conference on Family Planning know this, and it's our job to make sure global health donors know and care about it as well.

Marian Starkey
marian@popconnect.org

Correction: In the article "India Projected to Become World's Most Populous Country Next Year" in the September issue, Kerala's floods were partially attributed to glacial melt in the Himalayas. Kerala's rivers come from the Western Ghats mountain range, which is not glaciated. Thanks to Prof. Stephen Warren for pointing out the error!

Letters to the Editor



Many people who are against abortion speak out passionately on behalf of “the unborn.” Their passion seems to dissipate once a fetus is no longer an abstraction, but a living person with needs.

Many seem oblivious to the plight of unwanted children, craving love and a fair chance at life. I’d like to speak out on their behalf, as I was one of them. Given away as an infant when my parents moved to the United States from Hungary, only for them to have a “change of heart” that caused them to bring me here later, I discovered the horrors of being unwanted.

My heart doesn’t bleed for “the unborn,” it bleeds for the countless unwanted, abused children who feel pain, neglect, and hunger all over the world.

Ava Barcelona

There was one question that was asked several times in September’s issue: Why haven’t people accepted the fact that overpopulation is and has been the number one driver of human misery?

Ancient “facts” played a huge role. Start with the idea that large populations guaranteed greater success on the ancient battlefield. Forget that starvation and deprivation led to nearly all of those battles. Move to religions wanting to assure their status by having astronomical numbers in attendance at services. Forget that many of their flock were poor beyond belief or starving because of the inability to care for their family size. Then switch to economics and know that large populations provide both work forces for production and large consumer numbers. Forget

that those workers and consumers would live with hardships that are unnecessary. End with the lie that people who love children have as many as possible. Forget that it would make more sense to believe that people who love children ensure that children never experience unnecessary suffering due to unnecessary numbers.

Here are some real facts. Battles wouldn’t have been necessary if people could have easily fed their families. It would be tough to convince happy people that war with equally happy people is necessary. Religion isn’t about numbers in the door; it is about the happiness of the people who exit the door. Only when all people are easily cared for is that a possibility. Last and most indubitable, is the fact that a limited area can only support a limited number of lives. Earth is a limited area and we must limit our population. Sooner or later we will have to face that indisputable fact. The only question is whether we will do so in time to save everything we love.

Eric Thompson

Hello from Northeast Ohio! As a new member, I just finished reading your opinion piece in the September issue. An excellent encapsulation, I feel, of what needs to be a constant refrain by most of our media outlets.

This retired educator is happy to have finally received *Population Connection* magazine. I will certainly consider adding the organization to my estate plans in the future.

J. Walker, M Ed.

THAILAND

GLOSSARY

Contraceptive Prevalence

Percentage of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) who are currently using any modern method of contraception

Unmet need for family planning

Percentage of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) who want to stop or delay childbearing but are not using a modern method of contraception

Demand for family planning satisfied by any modern method

Percentage of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods

Infant mortality rate

Probability of dying between birth and exactly one year of age





Then & Now

1974

2022

39.9 million	POPULATION	71.7 million
4.63	TOTAL FERTILITY RATE	1.32
29.3%	CONTRACEPTIVE PREVALENCE	74.9%
52.4%	DEMAND FOR FAMILY PLANNING SATISFIED BY ANY MODERN METHOD	89.8%
26.6%	UNMET NEED FOR FAMILY PLANNING	8.5%
60.6	LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH	79.7
61.5	INFANT MORTALITY RATE	7.1

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). Data Portal, custom data acquired via website. United Nations: New York. Available from <https://population.un.org/DataPortal/> (accessed October 18, 2022).



IN THE NEWS

By Olivia Nater, Communications Manager

U.S. Abortion Bans Continue to Take Effect, India Expands Access

As of late October, at least 13 states had banned most abortions, following the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* in June. Eventually, about half of states are expected to enact full bans or gestational limits. Some of these states have been sued to block enforcement of abortion bans, and the procedure remains legal while courts determine whether new or existing bans can be implemented.

By contrast, India's Supreme Court ruled that all women, regardless of their marital status, have the right to abortion until 24 weeks of pregnancy. Under the previous law, abortion up to 24 weeks was limited to married women, divorcees or widows, minors, rape survivors, and mentally ill women, while all other women could only access the procedure up to 20 weeks.

Report Shows Health Impact of Climate Change Ahead of COP27

A major new *Lancet* report demonstrates how climate change is exacerbating food insecurity, health impacts from extreme heat, risk of infectious disease outbreaks, and life-threatening extreme weather events. The report was published two weeks ahead of COP27, which took place in Egypt from November 6-18. The authors urge world leaders to prioritize human lives over fossil fuels, to end harmful subsidies, and to increase funding for "a just transition towards affordable, healthy, zero-carbon energy."

Nations' Climate Plans "Woefully Inadequate"

At a landmark 2015 climate meeting in Paris, world leaders pledged to limit global warming to "well below" 2°C and "ideally" 1.5°C. As part of the Paris Agreement, parties must present action plans to achieve this goal. A new report by the World Resources Institute (WRI) found that by September 2022, countries had communicated 139 new or updated plans. However, these are "woefully inadequate to avert the climate crisis." If implemented, the latest plans would reduce 2030 emissions by 7 percent from 2019 levels. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), emissions must decline by at least 43 percent from 2019 levels to keep the 1.5°C goal within reach.

Fastest Growing U.S. Cities Under Highest Climate Risk

New research by Axios shows that nine of the 10 fastest-growing urban areas in the U.S. have seen an increase in the number of "very hot" days between 1991 and 2020, where "very hot" means a high temperature in the top 5 percent ever recorded for that particular city.

The number of "very hot" days in Las Vegas, Austin, and Raleigh has increased by 115 percent, 553 percent, and 59 percent, respectively. Populations are also rapidly expanding in areas with high and growing natural disaster risks, including parts of Florida (as evidenced by the devastating impact of Hurricane Ian), as well as fire-prone areas throughout California.

Four in Five U.S. Maternal Deaths Are Preventable

An assessment of more than 1,000 pregnancy-related deaths between 2017 and 2019 by the CDC reveals that a staggering 84 percent could have been avoided with "reasonable changes." More than half of pregnancy-related deaths (53 percent) occurred between one week and one year after pregnancy, 25 percent occurred on the day of delivery or within 7 days after, and 22 percent happened during pregnancy.

The U.S. has a maternal mortality crisis, with rates many times higher than those of other wealthy nations. Black women are especially vulnerable, with a three times higher likelihood of dying from pregnancy-related causes than white women. Mental health conditions leading to suicide and drug overdose were the leading cause of maternal deaths (23 percent), followed by excessive bleeding (14 percent) and cardiac problems (13 percent). The report recommends improving access to insurance coverage, preventing barriers to transportation to care, and developing better referral and coordination systems.

Precipitous Drop in Wildlife Populations

The Living Planet Report, published by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) every two years, is a comprehensive analysis of trends in global biodiversity and the health of our planet. This year's report shows that despite three decades of conservation interventions, biodiversity loss continues unabated.

Monitored populations of wild mammals, fish, reptiles, birds, and amphibians declined by an average of 69 percent between 1970 and 2018. The worst affected geographic region was Latin America and the Caribbean, with a staggering 94 percent drop in wild vertebrate populations over five decades (largely due to rampant deforestation), followed by Africa (66 percent), Asia-Pacific (55 percent), North America (20 percent), and Europe and Central Asia (18 percent). Freshwater animals were the worst-affected group, with populations having dropped by an average of 83 percent since 1970.

The authors recommend a holistic approach to the interconnected crises of biodiversity loss and climate change that addresses their root causes: rapid economic growth, increases in human population, international trade, and choices of technology.

Current Rate of Progress Puts Gender Equality Centuries Away

Two new reports on progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) show we are far off track for achieving gender equality by the 2030 deadline, with the current rate of progress suggesting women won't reach equity with men until at least the 22nd century.

According to the UN's 2022 gender snapshot, closing gaps in legal protections and removing discriminatory laws alone could take up to a staggering

286 years based on the current rate of change, while the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's annual Goalkeepers report suggests that we might achieve gender equality in 2108 at the earliest.

Over 1.2 billion women and girls of reproductive age live in countries and areas with restricted access to safe abortion, and the Covid-19 pandemic caused further disruptions to vital sexual and reproductive health services. Ending child marriage by 2030 would require progress to happen 17 times faster than it has in the last decade, and if current trends continue, there will be more women and girls living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa in 2030 than there are today.


Both publications call for increased funding for women's empowerment—in 2020, spending on programs where gender equality was the main objective made up only 4.6 percent of bilateral overseas development aid.

China Announces Plan to Boost Births

On October 16, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that he intends to “establish a policy system to boost birth rates and pursue a proactive national strategy in response to population aging.” At 1.4 billion, China has the highest number of people of all countries, but its fertility rate has fallen to a record low (1.18 births per woman, according to the UN Population Division), and some experts believe the population may already have peaked.

The latest UN population data project that India will surpass China as the world's most populous country in 2023. Worried about economic implications of a shrinking, aging population, Chinese authorities have been introducing measures to encourage people to have larger families, including tax deductions, longer maternity leave, housing subsidies, and cash for a third child. Nevertheless, surveys show that most Chinese women have no desire to have more children, and human rights proponents fear the government could resort to coercive measures, such as restricting access to contraception and safe abortion.

Water Scarcity Fueling Violent Conflict in Northern Africa

The combination of climate change, rapid population growth, and poverty is increasingly leading to conflict in fragile states. In parts of Northern Africa, critical water shortage has led to outbreaks of violence, with communities fighting over access to the precious resource. The crisis has created a flood of refugees—the UN estimates that more than half-a-million have fled into Chad (itself one of the poorest countries in the world) from neighboring nations with high levels of violence, including Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Sudan. 

The digital version of this article includes hyperlinked sources: popconnect.org/article/in-the-news-december-2022/

Great Groups on the Ground

By Natalie Widel, Director of Digital Marketing

VIRTUAL EVENTS EXPLORE OUR NEW WORLD OF 8 BILLION

Hundreds of members joined us for a mini-series that explored the ramifications of the 8 billion milestone, which we reached on November 15, 2022. These included:

- *Youth Voices on Reproductive Rights and Environmental Sustainability in a World of 8 Billion* with Swostika Thapaliya, Youth Innovator at **YUWA Nepal**, and Riju Dhakal, former President of YUWA
- *Moving the Needle: Realizing Girls' Rights Through Holistic, Community-Driven Programming* with Monica Nyiraguhabwa, Founder and Executive Director of **Girl Up Initiative Uganda**
- *Marking 8 Billion in the Classroom* with **Population Education**, a presentation by Population Connection's Laura Short, Senior Education Program Associate, and Barbara Huth, Online Learning Coordinator
- *A Demographic Milestone: Reporting on the 8 Billion Mark*, a presentation by Population Connection's **Communications Team**: Marian Starkey, VP for Communications, Hannah Evans, Senior Analyst, and Olivia Nater, Communications Manager



Monica Nyiraguhabwa gives a presentation over Zoom

Population Connection hosts virtual events several times each month, throughout the year. See what's coming up next at popconnect.org/virtual-events. We hope to see you virtually in 2023!

LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR GLOBAL PARTNERS

Population Connection is proud to partner with a growing number of small organizations working to remove barriers to girls' education, increase access to public health and family planning services, and conserve wildlife. Since 2016, we have made grants to small organizations around the world working on the ground in their local communities to offer programs and services that contribute to stabilizing global population.



Population Connection is not a service provider, but we recognize that the efforts of these small-to medium-sized organizations help to fulfill our mission. Not only does their work complement our population education, communications, and advocacy programs, but these partnerships allow us to raise their profiles, share their stories, and serve as a platform for their on-the-ground insights into challenges related to population growth where they live.

You can learn more about our current global partners at popconnect.org/learn/international-partnerships.

If you'd like to contribute toward our **Global Partners program**, your gift will be **DOUBLED** by a generous fellow supporter, now through December 31! This special campaign will match up to \$250,000 in gifts, allowing Population Connection to provide a transformative level of support to partner organizations working to improve access to reproductive health care, remove barriers to girls' education, protect biodiversity, and preserve wildlife habitats.

You can make your gift at popconnect.org/give-global.

Photos, top to bottom:

Uganda's Conservation Through Public Health (CTPH) team monitoring the Mubare gorilla group in September 2020;

Madagascar's Lemur Love rangers reviewing samples;

Kenya's Stretchers Youth Organization project officer engaging informal workers during a community outreach forum in Mikindani, Mombasa County



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honors those who have included Population Connection in their estate plans or who have established a Charitable Gift Annuity.

We are grateful to ZPG Society members for their generosity and far-sightedness. **Thank you!**



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Daniel Weinstein
Louis Wenckus
Ira Werner
Timothy Wernette & Carolyn Brown
Lisa Wersal
Jay West
Jo Lynne Whiting
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Sharon Marie Wilcox
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Arlene Wilson
John Wilson
William Wolverton
Lucille Wood-Trost
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Douglas Young
Cheryl Zabinski
Lynn Zoch

What Will Your Legacy Be?

If you aren't yet a member of the ZPG Society, have you considered becoming one? The simplest way for you to ensure that your dedication to Population Connection's mission continues well into the future is through a gift—a bequest—in your will. You can create a bequest by adding just one sentence to your will. That sentence can make the difference of a lifetime!

Sample Bequest Language:

After fulfilling all other provisions, I give, devise, and bequeath ____% of the remainder of my estate [or \$____ if a specific amount] to Population Connection (Tax ID #94-1703155), a charitable corporation currently located at 2120 L Street NW, Suite 500 Washington, DC 20037.

For more information, contact our development staff at legacy@popconnect.org or (877) 319-9880.



ZPG Society Member: Eva Moseley

Eva Moseley migrated from Austria to the U.S. with her family shortly before the Nazis perpetrated the Final Solution. She graduated from Mount Holyoke, earned an MA in Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard, married, and had two children. She spent her career as the manuscripts curator of the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College, the leading center for research on the history of women in the U.S. Being curator was her ideal job, she said. “It made me a feminist, a willing public speaker, and, I hope, a collegial boss.” Here is part of the interview Eva sat for with Lee Polansky, Senior Director of Executive Initiatives and Special Projects. For the full transcript, please go to popconnect.org/article/eva-moseley.



Photo by Joan Burns

Your family migrated from Austria to the U.S. around the time of Kristallnacht in 1938. Can you tell our readers what it was like?

For me, at age seven, emigrating was “a safe adventure.” I was with my family, and we had a fairly easy trip by train and ship, like tourists, without the uncertainty, harassment, or dangers most refugees suffered.

Getting used to another language and culture was easier for me than the others, including my brother, Paul, who was 10. Paul and I went to New York City public schools. While he earned a degree in engineering at City College, I left NYC for Mount Holyoke College, where I earned a BA in Philosophy. Continuing my then-interest in mystical traditions, I earned an MA in Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard.

Instead of living the scholarly life, I turned to jobs related to Asia, which is how I met my husband, George Moseley. We lived in a number of different places: Macau, where George represented CARE; New Haven, where our daughter, Jessica, was born (George got an MA at Yale); NYC, where our son, Tom,

was born; a year each at Harvard and the University of London; and a year at Oxford University before and after a year in Hong Kong.


When did you become interested in population issues? And when did you discover Population Connection (known then as ZPG)?

Early on, I had doubts about the American desire for endless growth. The Hindu view of the world as “cyclical” always made more sense to me. The seasons are cyclical and so is life: plant, animal, human—whether it’s birth-maturing-decline-death, with dead animals and plants feeding new life; or the exchange of CO₂ and oxygen between plants and animals. These and other cycles are sustainable and different from the ideal of endless growth, which is unrealistic and unsustainable.

Why did you decide to establish a Charitable Gift Annuity with Population Connection, and what does it mean for you to be a member of our legacy group, the ZPG Society?

At 91, I’m not much of an activist anymore, but it’s good to think that some money I give will be helping Population Connection with its essential work, long after I’m gone.

*If you’d like to learn more about Eva’s fascinating life, please buy her memoir, published in May 2022. You can order *Skirting History: Holocaust Refugee to Dissenting Citizen* (Olive Branch Press, 2022), preferably from your local independent bookstore.*

To find out how a Population Connection Charitable Gift Annuity might work for you, contact our Development Team at (877) 319-9880 or giving@popconnect.org. 



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‘Captain Condom’ Turned the Tide in Thailand’s War on AIDS and Overpopulation

At a time when most Thais avoided discussing safe sex and family planning, Mechai Viravaidya promoted condom use with spectacle and humor, saving millions of lives.

Article by Seth Mydans | Photos by Lauren DeCicca for *The New York Times* | Originally published on August 5, 2022, by *The New York Times*



Concerned that Thailand's population was growing at an unsustainable pace, Mechai Viravaidya began promoting condom usage in the early 1970s, when few were willing to broach the subject.

Mechai Viravaidya twice saw Thailand in desperate trouble—first from a ruinous population explosion and then from the AIDS epidemic—and he responded to both crises the same way: with condoms and his own considerable charisma.

Birth control was something Thais neither talked about nor very much

practiced in the early 1970s, when the country's population was growing at an unsustainable pace and the average family had five children.

So Mr. Mechai decided to tackle the subject that no one else would touch, spearheading a nationwide campaign to publicize and demystify contraceptives.

"It wasn't a job for intelligent people, smart people, respectable people, aristocratic people," he said in a June interview.

Mr. Mechai, now 81, is in fact all of these, the foreign-educated son of two doctors, the husband of a former private secretary to the king and, over the years, a government minister, organizational leader, and senator.

But he is also uninhibited, unpretentious, and always willing to put on a show to persuade people.

His goal with the family planning campaign, he said, was to make condoms just one more item shoppers picked up in the market, along with soap, toothpaste, and dried fish. To pull that off, he knew it would help to lend condoms positive associations, something that made people smile.

"If I can accomplish that by blowing up condoms or filling them with water," he said, "then fine, I'll do it."

Mr. Mechai was speaking not far from the Bangkok offices of the Population and Community Development Association, the organization he founded nearly 50 years ago to fight poverty in Thailand, with family planning a linchpin.

He toured the country, village to village, with an endless array of gimmicks and publicity stunts that linked condoms

Mechai Viravaidya twice saw Thailand in desperate trouble—first from a ruinous population explosion and then from the AIDS epidemic—and he responded to both crises the same way: with condoms and his own considerable charisma.

Birth control was something Thais neither talked about nor very much practiced in the early 1970s, when the country's population was growing at an unsustainable pace and the average family had five children.



with fun. Filling them up with water past the point of breaking was a staple performance.

“Who can blow up the biggest condom?” he would call out to the crowds. “Who can make it burst!”

He opened what he called family planning “supermarkets” at bus stations to distribute contraceptives and persuaded

Buddhist monks to bless condoms, distributing videos of the ceremonies. To educate younger Thais, he produced a safe-sex English alphabet that included letters like B for birth control, C for condom, and V for vasectomy.

In addition to the spectacle, the campaign had serious infrastructure behind it. He mobilized and trained a network

of 350,000 teachers and 12,000 village community leaders.

And he didn’t limit his family planning efforts only to condoms. In Bangkok, he offered mass free vasectomies on a parade ground near the palace to celebrate the king’s birthday.

Some found his methods offensive, or at least insufficiently decorous. A



newspaper columnist, trying to formulate an insult, suggested that people start calling condoms “mechais.”

The idea caught on, and Mr. Mechai framed a copy of the article to hang on his wall.

It all added up to more publicity, the main weapon in his arsenal, and the results of his campaign were dramatic.



Left: Mr. Mechai giving a talk during a workshop on food security for the elderly, in Bangkok. In addition to his work on family planning and safe sex, he has focused on addressing a range of social and economic issues in Thailand. Above: Mr. Mechai founded the Population and Community Development Association nearly 50 years ago to fight poverty in Thailand, with family planning a linchpin.

Thailand’s population growth rate fell from more than 3 percent in 1974 to 0.6 percent in 2005, and the average number of children per family shrank from five to fewer than two.

The World Bank called Mr. Mechai’s campaign “one of the most successful and effective family planning programs in the world.”

In 1970, both Thailand and the Philippines had equivalent populations of 36 million.

“Now we have about 70 million and they have 107 million,” Mr. Mechai said in the interview, actually understating the Philippines population, which is over 110 million. He added that if Thailand hadn’t addressed its population issue, it, too, would be sending millions of its citizens abroad to find work.

“If we hadn’t stepped in, it would have been to the deep detriment of the economy of Thailand and the quality of life,” he said.

When the AIDS pandemic began to overwhelm Thailand in the late 1980s,

Thailand's population growth rate fell from more than 3 percent in 1974 to 0.6 percent in 2005, and the average number of children per family shrank from five to fewer than two.



Mr. Mechai employed the same knack for publicity, persuasiveness, and showmanship in combating the disease.

As with his first condom campaign, he initially struck out on his own as the government refused to back a safe-sex campaign, fearing it would hurt the lucrative sex-tourism industry.

So Mr. Mechai turned instead to the military, a powerful institution beyond the reach of civilian government, which agreed to air regular safe-sex announcements on its 300 radio stations and five television stations.

Then, in 1991, a new prime minister, Anand Panyarachun, embraced AIDS prevention, making Mr. Mechai his minister of information and tourism. Every

government ministry was now called on to play a role in AIDS education.

“We had condoms out everywhere on the streets—everywhere, everywhere,” Mr. Mechai said in a TED Talk recounting his approach. “In taxis, you get condoms, and also, in traffic, the policemen give you condoms.”



Left: Cabbages & Condoms, a restaurant in Bangkok whose profits fund Mr. Mechai's work, is famous for its condom-themed decor, including bouquets of condoms, condoms offered in place of dinner mints, and a year-round Christmas tree festooned with condoms. Above: Free condoms on offer at Cabbages & Condoms

And Mr. Mechai—despite or perhaps because of his MBA. from Harvard—took it upon himself to become the recognizable symbol that he said every successful marketing program needs, dubbing himself “Captain Condom” and going to schools and night clubs to promote safe sex.

The World Health Organization called Thailand's approach to the AIDS crisis

“the quickest response to the problem that we have ever seen.” The United Nations said Mr. Mechai's program had achieved a 90 percent decline in new infections, and the World Bank estimated that it had saved 7.7 million lives between 1991 and 2012.

Mr. Mechai was born in Bangkok in 1941, to a Scottish mother, Isabella MacKinnon Robertson, and a Thai father, Samak Viravaidya, both doctors, who had met as students at the University of Edinburgh Medical School.

Raised speaking Thai and English, he went to high school and college in Australia, earning a bachelor's degree in commerce in 1964 from the University of Melbourne.

His comfort among both Thais and Westerners, Mr. Mechai said, has enhanced his ability to pitch his programs—and lobby for financing—in different cultures, successfully courting

substantial grants from foundations, development organizations, and foreign governments.

Returning to Thailand in 1966, Mr. Mechai thought at first of becoming a doctor like his parents. “I helped my father stitch up a finger that had been cut off, holding on to a rubber tourniquet,” he said, “and I realized, that's not for me.”

Attracted by the wide range of issues it addressed, he joined the government's National Economic and Social Development Board, where he served for eight years as an economist.

At the same time, he found other outlets for his energies, writing a newspaper column, hosting an evening radio show, and teaching a part-time university English course.

His penchant for performance also led him to acting, and he appeared in a popular, sentimental TV drama, “Star-Crossed



A photo of Mr. Mechai with a condom around his thumb during a campaign to promote safe sex and family planning

Lovers,” playing a Japanese army officer who falls in love with a Thai college student during World War II.

In 1971, he married a childhood friend, Thanpuying Putrie, with whom he has one daughter. His wife is a cousin of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the father of the current king, and she served for years as his deputy principal private secretary.

Mr. Mechai delights in saying that his mother was the doctor who delivered his future wife.

In his role as a government economist, he toured the country and saw firsthand the poverty and the social and economic dislocations that he later devoted his life to addressing.

“There were children everywhere,” he said of Thai villages. “This was the great problem. And I realized I was wrong in thinking the government could do everything. So I decided to go out on my own.”

In 1974, he left government to found the Population and Community Development Association. It flourished



and branched out to address a range of social and economic issues, from rural development to environmental protection.

In the years that followed, his career path took him in and out of government roles, including as cabinet spokesman, deputy industry minister, and three terms as a

member of the Senate between 1987 and 2006.

In addition to his work on family planning and safe sex, developing Thailand's rural economy has been a decades-long focus of his activism. In the 1990s, he founded the Village Development Project, which aims to foster entrepreneurship and create income-generating activities in rural Thailand.

It has set up small factories in the countryside to lure workers back home from sweatshops in Bangkok, part of an effort to combat the urban migration that has debilitated rural economies.


He said his greatest pride now is the Mechai Bamboo School in northeastern Thailand, set up to “re-engineer rural education” by turning the school into a lifelong learning center and an active contributor to life in its community.

A boarding school with a student body of 180 that makes a point of including undocumented and disabled students, it extends the concept of education into a set of life skills, according to Mr. Mechai.

“The school aims to foster good citizens who are honest, willing to share, and truly accept and practice gender equality,” Mr. Mechai said.

Its outreach programs offer assistance to older villagers, give nutritional advice to pregnant women, and assist in small-scale agriculture.

Mr. Mechai said more than 100 small rural schools have begun to follow his lead in becoming more involved in their communities.

Though now at an age when most people are slowing down, Mr. Mechai has no plans to stop addressing what he said were his life's main concerns: “to combat economic and social inequality by reducing births, reducing deaths from AIDS, and reducing poverty, financial dependence, and ignorance.” 

In 1970, both Thailand and the Philippines had equivalent populations of 36 million.

“Now we have about 70 million and they have 107 million,” Mr. Mechai said in the interview, actually understating the Philippines population, which is over 110 million. He added that if Thailand hadn't addressed its population issue it, too, would be sending millions of its citizens abroad to find work.

International Conference on Family Planning

Pattaya City, Thailand
November 14-17, 2022

icfp2022.org



Clockwise, from top left: Hannah Evans, Senior Analyst, and Yasmeen Silva, National Field Manager, in the Population Connection exhibit booth; Yasmeen showing off our booth design by Mali Welch (who also designs Pop Facts); Nancy Gomes, Digital Media Coordinator, speaking to conference participants from inside our booth; Yasmeen and Melvine Ouyo, Population Connection board member, with Wotter the Otter, the mascot for Wondaleaf Unisex Condoms



Clockwise, from top left: Mechai Viravaidya at the opening ceremony; our good friend Dr. Tlaleng Mofokeng (Dr. T) at the opening ceremony; Melvine in the conference hall; Hannah and fellow panelists for the Population Matters-hosted session “Family Planning, Planetary Solutions, and the Sustainable Development Goals: Choice, Rights, and Everything in Between”; Melvine and Olivia Nater, Communications Manager, in the conference hall





Clockwise, from top left: Hannah, Mechai Viravaidya, and Olivia outside the Cabbages & Condoms restaurant in Pattaya City, Thailand; condom art; Population and Community Development Association (PDA) supporters march through the conference halls wearing clothing and accessories made of condoms; more PDA condom clothing; sign at Cabbages & Condoms about a school supported by the restaurant's profits





Clockwise, from right: Yasmeen and Hannah visit LAMPS Teen Center, which provides comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care and counseling to young people; condom decor exhibition at LAMPS; Hannah and Nancy show off two of the condom art pieces; students at Wat Koh School, a partner of PDA, demonstrate a comprehensive peer sex education lesson; Wat Koh staff upcycle plastic waste into useful products





Abortion Was on the Ballot, and Voters Showed Up to Retain Their Rights

By Brian Dixon, Senior Vice President for Governmental and Political Affairs

Note: This column was written using the information available to us at the time of our press deadline, November 17, 2022.

Voters across the United States held back the so-called “red wave” predicted by pundits.

Reproductive rights and abortion access drove Democrats and young people to the polls to keep Republican gains minimal in the U.S. House of Representatives and non-existent in the U.S. Senate. Voters also supported enshrining abortion access in state law by passing ballot measures in California, Michigan, and Vermont. Voters in Kentucky defeated an effort to ban abortion in that state by a decisive margin. And even in states where abortion rights were not on the ballot directly, they were essential to stopping the long-predicted Republican sweep.

Abortion is why, in Pennsylvania, Senator-elect John Fetterman beat Dr. Oz and why Rep. Susan Wild (D-PA-7) held on to her seat in a toss-up district. Abortion is why, in Virginia, Abigail Spanberger (D-VA-7) and Jennifer Wexton (D-VA-10) were re-elected to the U.S. House. Abortion is why President Biden and Vice President Harris held a celebratory rally in Washington, DC, on the Thursday following the election, rather than hosting a Democratic post-mortem meeting.

And abortion is why Democrats won control of all of Michigan’s government for the first time since the early 1980s. In addition to passing an abortion rights ballot measure in Michigan, voters gave Democrats a sweep of the state-wide offices, re-electing Gov. Gretchen Whitmer by a wide margin and denying an election denialist the Secretary of State job. Crucially, Democrats also picked up majorities in both the Michigan state House and Senate.

In Arizona, Sen. Mark Kelly held off a challenge from Blake Masters to win a full six-year term. And Democrat Kelly Hobbs will take over the Governor’s office.

In Pennsylvania, Rep. Susan Wild, a champion of family planning programs whose campaign focused on threats to abortion rights, defeated her Republican opponent. Democrat John Fetterman flipped the Senate seat currently held by Republican Pat Toomey, defeating New Jersey resident and celebrity doctor Mehmet Oz. At his victory party in Pittsburgh, Fetterman’s supporters munched on crudités in an unsubtle jab

at a much-mocked ad Dr. Oz ran on TV during his campaign. Fetterman was clear in his support for reproductive freedom, as was Pennsylvania’s new Governor-elect Josh Shapiro. Shapiro pledges to keep the Commonwealth pro-choice, and the fact that Democrats flipped the state House of Representatives makes that a much simpler task.

In Virginia, two pro-choice Democratic women—Reps. Jennifer Wexton and Abigail Spanberger—held on to their seats in swing districts by highlighting their opponents’ support for national abortion bans. Spanberger ran compelling television ads about her opponent’s claims that she would oppose any exceptions to a ban because pregnancy from rape was highly unlikely because it didn’t occur “organically.”

In Nevada, Democratic incumbents held on to three competitive House seats and the U.S. Senate seat. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto’s victory gave Democrats the Senate majority, with the runoff election in Georgia still to come at our press time.

In New Hampshire, all three Democratic incumbents on the ballot dispatched election denying opponents who promised to support a national abortion ban. Rep. Chris Pappas, whose district was gerrymandered to make it more likely to fall to a Republican, won with 54 percent of the vote. Pappas has worked with Population Connection since first coming to Congress four years ago. His colleague in the House, Rep. Annie Kuster, won her race by a similar margin. Sen. Maggie Hassan was elected to a second term by a 10-point margin. All were considered toss-ups prior to Election Day.

Among the newly elected members of Congress coming to Washington in January are Ohio Representative-elect Greg Landsman, who defeated long-time Republican incumbent and outspoken foe of abortion rights Steve Chabot. Landsman ran as a defender of reproductive freedom and picked up a seat in the Cincinnati area.

It wasn't all wine and roses for Democrats though. Their hopes to pick up open Senate seats in Ohio and North Carolina were dashed. Several champions of global family planning programs were defeated in tight races in swing districts. And the loss of the House

majority, albeit by an extremely narrow margin, will cause additional challenges to expanding access to family planning around the world and tackling the crucial challenges of population growth and sustainable development.

Congress returned to Washington the week after the election with a packed agenda, including orientation for newly elected members, party leadership elections, and the unfinished business of passing 2023 appropriations bills. Current members still need to decide on funding levels for international family planning programs—funding that has been stagnant for 12 years. And we'll be pushing them to include the Global HER Act provision to prevent a future president from unilaterally reimposing the devastating Global Gag Rule.

According to polling we commissioned by Lake Research Partners during this election, a solid majority of voters, both Democrats and Republicans, support repealing the Helms Amendment that has banned the use of foreign assistance for abortion care around the world, oppose the Global Gag Rule, and oppose pharmacists refusing to fill prescriptions because of personal moral or religious objections.

We can build a future that brings everyone along and leaves no one behind. We can build a future that welcomes everyone and vilifies no one. We can build a future that gives equal opportunity to all—a future that gives equal opportunity to all and special privileges to none. And a future, a future that protects everyone's fundamental civil rights and personal freedoms.

— Rep. Chris Pappas (D-NH-1)



A Classroom Simulation for 8 Billion and Growing

By Pamela Wasserman, Senior Vice President for Education

We've just reached a huge global population milestone: 8 billion. To help students better understand how we got here and where we might be headed, we use visual representations and simulations in the classroom. One such high school activity is "Where Do We Grow From Here?" which we recently updated to include the latest UN population projections. The full lesson, including printable props, can be found at WorldPopulationHistory.org. Here's a condensed version of Part 2 (Population Growth by Region: 1800-2100).

Where Do We Grow From Here?

UN demographers expect more than 2 billion people to be added to the planet before the end of the century, and most of this growth will be in just a handful of countries. Here's a way to show where population growth has happened and where it will likely occur in the future.

The lesson includes 44 counting cards and five paper plates. Each plate is labeled with the name of a UN World Region and outlined with the color found on that region's counting card: Africa (green), Asia (red), Europe (brown), Latin America (blue), and Northern America (orange). *Note: Oceania isn't included because its population is too small to be accurately represented in the simulation.*

1. Arrange the paper plates on a table or set of desks. Distribute the 44 counting cards (many students will get two cards). Each card represents 250 million people. Have students gather around the table/desks where you have placed the labeled paper plates.
2. Explain that you will all be traveling through time from 1800 to 2100 to see how population has grown, and will

grow, during that 300-year period. The time travel will be represented by counting from 1 to 100, and with every number recited, three years will pass. So when the group reaches 100, all 300 years will have elapsed and you will be in the year 2100.

3. When a card's number is reached, that student should place the card onto the plate indicated by the world region listed on the card. Each additional card on the plate represents an increase in the region's population. The one exception is card 94, which should not be added to a plate. Instead, the student with this card will remove a counting card from Europe when counting reaches 94 (in the year 2082).
4. Ask the four students holding cards with the number "0" to place these cards on the respective plates to begin the simulation (there will be three on the Asia plate, and one will be on the Europe plate). Explain that these cards represent the global population in the year 1800 when population first reached 1 billion. While people lived in every region in 1800, Asia and Europe were the predominant population centers at the time.
5. As a group, start counting at a comfortable pace. Stop when you reach 74, which corresponds to present day (2022). Have the students share observations about the population distribution in 2022. What is the global population? What region is most populated? What region is growing the fastest? The slowest?
6. Continue counting to 100. With the simulation completed, have the students share observations about the population distribution in 2100 and go over the discussion questions.



Discussion Questions:

1. What is the total projected global population in 2100?

Based on the simulation, the total global population in 2100 is projected to be about 10.5 billion (42 cards x 250 million per card = 10.5 billion). The UN's projection for 2100 is 10.4 billion people.

2. By the end of the simulation, which two regions are the most populated? What are those regions' projected populations in 2100?

Asia is the most populated, with 20 cards representing 5 billion people. This is followed by Africa, with 15 cards representing 3.75 billion people.

3. Which region is growing the fastest and will add the most people between now and 2100?

Africa. The continent is expected to add about 2.5 billion people by the end of the century. Most of this growth will be in sub-Saharan African countries.

4. What are some of the challenges for the least developed countries that will experience the greatest future population growth?

Least developed countries lack the infrastructure to provide for a rapidly growing population, including employment, transportation, education, health care, energy, housing, clean water, and sanitation. In addition, they may lack the ability to grow or import adequate food supplies.

The full lesson plan includes an analysis of the UN's projection graphs and fertility scenarios and independent research on organizations working to address the challenges that keep fertility rates high in some of the least developed countries of the world (e.g. barriers to girls' education, family planning services, and health care to reduce child mortality).

Other Ways PopEd Is Marking the 8 Billion Milestone:

- 8 billion themed teacher webinars and workshops
- Blogs explaining the milestone and the UN projections
- World of 8 Billion international student video contest (submissions due February 2023—see Worldof8Billion.org)
- Two new classroom posters—a revised world population map and a timeline wall chart of world population history
- Bookmarks showing all of the population milestones to date

CARTOON



Clay Bennett editorial cartoon used with permission of Clay Bennett, Counterpoint Syndication and the Cartoonist Group. All rights reserved.

Los Angeles Times

When the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June, leaving the right to control one's own body and decision to be a parent to the whims of state lawmakers, it fell to advocates and voters to fight to protect reproductive rights. A record six measures concerning abortion were placed on state ballots this year across the country.

By Tuesday night, voters made their wishes clear—they want to maintain their access to abortion. Of the five measures on the Nov. 8 ballot, four have won by resounding margins and a fifth has a healthy lead.

...

"It may be a new day in the way this issue is being thought about," said Nancy Northup, the chief executive of the Center for Reproductive Rights, citing the victory of abortion rights in liberal, moderate, and conservative states alike. "I hope this will be seen as a nonpartisan issue that is about rights and health."

...

The Supreme Court said in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the case overturning *Roe*, that decisions about reproductive rights should be left to the people and their lawmakers. It's ludicrous that politicians should be allowed to decide how much or how little individuals can control their bodies. But having been dealt that grim reality, advocates and voters have shown they will use the ballot box to win back what should never have been lost.

Polls continually indicate that a majority of Americans support the right to abortion and disagree with the Supreme Court's decision to abolish that right. And the results so far on all the abortion-related measures on the Nov. 8 ballot show that voters—in states from the most liberal to the most conservative—want their reproductive rights upheld. That is a powerful and profound statement that must not be ignored.

– November 9, 2022

The Washington Post

In Michigan, Vermont, and California, voters in Tuesday's mid-term elections overwhelmingly approved ballot initiatives that will enshrine the right to abortion in their state constitutions. In Kentucky, voters rejected a state constitutional amendment that would have protected the state's near-total abortion ban from legal challenges. And in Montana, voters nixed a measure that would have criminalized health care providers who do not make every effort to save the life of an infant "born during an attempted abortion" or after labor or Caesarean section.

...

Americans all over the map turned out to defend reproductive freedom. The wins served as a rebuke to the Supreme Court, which in June stripped away the constitutional right to abortion, and as a warning to lawmakers who seek to make medical decisions that should be left up to women and their doctors.

The Kentucky and Montana results follow those in Kansas, another Republican-leaning state, where voters rejected in August a constitutional amendment that would have ended abortion protections. These results underscore that most Americans generally favor abortion rights—and that a gap too often exists between what voters want and what lawmakers enact.

Questions of reproductive rights also appear to have influenced some candidates' races. Republicans had tried to deflect attention from abortion to other issues, such as inflation or crime. But in exit polls, almost 3 in 10 voters said abortion was the most important issue affecting their votes; about 4 in 10 voters said they were "angry" about the June court ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade* and its nearly 50 years of constitutional protections.

...

Short of an unlikely Supreme Court reversal, the best way to restore women's reproductive rights is for Congress to codify *Roe's* protections in federal law. ...

– November 10, 2022



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Photo: Iguazu Falls seen from the National Park in Argentina | ivotheeditors

Go to popconnect.org/legacy to learn more, or contact our development staff at legacy@popconnect.org or (877) 319-9880.