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As the world's population reaches six billion, Faith Mitchell from the National Research Council discusses the reasons for the rising population and the social problems that come with more people on the earth.

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MATT LAUER, co-host:
You may not have received the birth announcement yet, but get ready to welcome baby number six billion. That's right, earlier today with the birth of a little baby in Bosnia, the world's population hit a whopping six billion people. Faith Mitchell is with the National Research Council--Council. Faith, good morning to you.

Ms. FAITH MITCHELL (National Research Council): Good morning.

LAUER: It's a nice round number, but is there any real significance to six billion?

Ms. MITCHELL: Well, sure. You know the United Nations and US Census Bureau are constantly trying to figure out the size of the world's population. And so right around now they know that it's reached this landmark figure. It means there are more people alive than ever before. But on the other hand, there are not nearly as many people as thirty years ago they thought there would be at this time.

LAUER: Let's take a look at some of the most populous countries in the world. Of course, China and India and the United States. Most people are going to look at this milestone, Faith, and they're going to talk about the bad news. Before we do that, what is the good news to six billion people?

TEXT:
Most Populous Countries
China 1,266,838,000 21.2%
India 998,056,000 16.7%
U.S. 276,218,000 4.6%

Ms. MITCHELL: There's a lot of good news. One--one piece of it, as I said, is that it's not as many people as they thought there would be at this time. Also, the reason there are so many people is that people are living longer because we have better health care and higher standards of living around the world. Also,
fewer babies are dying. So that part of the increase actually reflects the fact that life is better for people everywhere.

LAUER: And, of course, then the downside is how are we going to support all these people as we head into the future? And there are some dramatic concerns for things like natural resources, energy, food, that sort of thing.

Ms. MITCHELL: Exactly. You know more people means that there's going to be more air pollution, for instance, as people drive cars. For the United States it probably means there's going to be more immigration, because lots of the people will want to come live here. And another implication is that high numbers can lead to political instability, and that, of course, has implications for this country.

LAUER: I want to put up a graphic, Faith, and I think people will find this alarming. Between the years of 1804 and 1927, so in a 123 year period, the population in the world grew by one billion. Now you fast forward between 1987 and 1999, that's a 12-year period, we added another billion. What does that tell us for the new millennium? How quickly is our population going to explode?

Ms. MITCHELL: Well, you know, it's--it's still going to go up for the next 50 years. But the good news is that it's not going to go up as quickly as it has been, you know the interval. How long it takes to get to the next billion is going to take longer. And then if we look out, say, a 100 years from now, they don't really know what the exact number will be, but if people have fewer kids, you might have only seven billion people in the year 2100. If people continue to have large families, you could have 17 billion.

LAUER: Isn't kind of the big unknown here, that group of 15- to 24-year-old in the world, many of whom live in underdeveloped countries and what they tend to do in terms of population?

Ms. MITCHELL: It sure is, because there are about a billion people in that age group, the largest number every in history. And, of course, those are the prime child-bearing years.

LAUER: All right, Faith Mitchell. We'll be keeping an eye on this number. Thanks very much.

Ms. MITCHELL: Thank you.