

Pope scores U.N. anti-natalist agenda

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Pope John Paul II met with the head of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities at the Vatican March 18, to inform her in no uncertain terms that the Holy See has grave concerns about the U.N.'s upcoming International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which is scheduled to take place in Cairo this September.

The ICPD is the fourth such international population conference which the U.N. has convened since the 1960s, and it is intended to set the stage for a renewed crackdown on population growth, especially in Third World countries.

'Future of humanity' at stake

According to a text of the pope's remarks released by the Vatican, the Pontiff warned Nafis Sadik, who is serving as secretary general of the Cairo event, that the "very future of humanity" could be threatened if the Cairo conference proceeds along its current anti-natalist, anti-human course.

The pope's public intervention into the process leading up to Cairo came just two weeks before the last preparatory committee meeting prior to Cairo opens in New York. That meeting is supposed to hammer out the final details of the draft declaration which will be presented to the Cairo conference for approval and implementation.

In his comments, the pope adamantly insisted on the inviolability of the family. Couples should be able to decide, "free from all social or legal coercion, the number of children they will have and the spacing of their births," he stated. "All propaganda and misinformation directed at persuading couples that they must limit their family to one or two children should be steadfastly avoided."

John Paul II reaffirmed the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion, which he described as a "heinous evil," and sterilization, which, he warned, poses "a most grave threat to human dignity and liberty when promoted as part of a population policy."

The pope explained to Sadik that his fears about the direction which the ICPD is headed stem from the church's concern for the sanctity of human life: "The Holy See seeks to focus attention on certain basic truths: That each and every person . . . has a dignity and worth that is unconditional and inalienable; that human life itself from conception to natural death is sacred; that human rights are innate and transcend

any constitutional order; and that the fundamental unity of the human race demands that everyone be committed to building a community which is free from injustice and which strives to promote and protect the common good."

From this standpoint, the "draft final document" which the U.N. bureaucracy has put together for Cairo "is a cause of grave concern to me," John Paul stated. He added that the document's proposals, which include making "family planning" services, including abortion, available to all individuals of childbearing age by the year 2015, contradict "certain basic principles."

Moreover, he said, "many of the principles which I have just mentioned find no place in its pages, or are totally marginalized."

"What is at stake here," the pope warned, "is the very future of humanity. Fundamental questions like the transmission of life, the family, and the material and moral development of society, need very serious consideration. . . . There is a tendency to promote an internationally recognized right to access of abortion on demand, without any restriction, with no regard to the rights of the unborn, in a manner which goes beyond what even now is unfortunately accepted by the laws of some nations."

Well-founded fears

The pope's fears are well-founded. Although the ICPD's draft program of action pays rhetorical obeisance to economic development and family life, and expresses opposition to involuntary population control, the real purpose of the Cairo meeting is to enforce new measures to drive down population levels—despite the fact that population growth has been declining over the past decade in many parts of the globe, in some cases precipitously.

In addition to calling for the massive expansion of contraceptive services, the draft program also states that "women should have access to safe abortion services," an objective shared by a number of countries, including the United States, which have been playing key roles in shaping the Cairo agenda.

U.S. State Department Counselor Tim Wirth, who will lead the U.S. delegation to Cairo, gave a briefing on U.S. population control policy and its strategy vis-à-vis the ICPD conference, last January. Wirth declared that the Clinton administration had made population control a "top priority" in "global affairs," and that it intends to retake the leadership of the international population control drive. He added that "the centerpiece" of this effort will be the Cairo conference, which "will be for population" what the U.N.'s 1992 eco-fascist extravaganza in Brazil "was for the environment."

Wirth said that the administration has already made a sharp increase in the U.S. contribution to world population programs, and that it is prepared to double its contribution to \$1 billion by the year 2000, in order to restrain population growth.