

EIREIR Document

Vatican, Islamic leaders battle Cairo '94's deadly agenda

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Less than a week from now, the United Nations' third International Conference on Population and Development is slated to convene in Cairo, Egypt. Although the oligarchical forces behind the Sept. 5-13 "killer conference" have been fighting tooth and nail to ensure that their program, which consists of radical depopulation measures, the stifling of economic development, and beefing up of U.N. powers, is adopted at the conference, what has been most striking about the controversy over Cairo is the aggressive counter-campaign that has been waged by religious and other institutions against the conference's agenda.

Despite the intentions of its organizers, the Cairo conference may, ironically, lead to the establishment of an ecumenical community of interests against the cultural pessimism and contempt for human dignity behind the campaign for population control. Over the past month, that potential has come closer to reality, as important sectors of the Islamic world, notably including the Center for Islamic Research of Cairo's Al Azhar University, have raised many of the same objections to the Cairo '94 draft agenda as the Vatican.

The significance of this development has not been lost on the anti-population crew. The prospect that two of the world's largest religious traditions, representing close to 2 billion people, might forge a collaborative relationship on such crucial issues as population policy, has sent the neomalthusians into a frenzy.

Within days after the Al Azhar statement was published, media outlets began frothing. Typical was a particularly vicious piece of black propaganda that appeared in the Aug. 18 *New York Times*. Subsequently picked up by the London press, the *New York Times* claimed that unnamed "western governments" feared that the Vatican, in its efforts to forge an ecumenical alliance against Cairo, is aligning itself with "radical Islamic forces backing the overthrow of governments in the Muslim world." *Washington Post* foreign corre-

spondent Jim Hoagland struck a similar tone on Aug. 22 under the headline, "John Paul II: Two Devils. . . ." An accompanying commentary by Lally Weymouth, "And One Crusade," states that the pope's opposition to the Cairo '94 draft document has left him "few allies; indeed he's actually had to enter into alliances with extremist states such as Iran in order to broaden his base of support."

Because of the importance of these developments, we are excerpting some of the major statements and documents that have been put forth by the religious opposition to the Cairo agenda.

Documentation

On August 8, Vatican spokesman Joaquín Navarro-Valls gave a press briefing in Rome, in which he highlighted the church's objections to the conference's draft program.

. . . The Holy See has participated in all the regional preparatory meetings of the Cairo conference. The Holy See is interested in a *consensus* on the well-being and the progress of the human family. It is not interested in—on the contrary, it considers unacceptable—a sectarian and ideologized consideration of population strategies which do not take into due consideration fundamental questions regarding the family and the moral and material development of society, such as the dignity of women and the rights of both parents and children. It cannot accept, moreover, that the rights of the unborn be completely ignored as if these rights did not exist at all. We are interested in a *consensus* on the real well-being of men and women but not in a *consensus* on words much less on "slogans." The Holy See is very aware that what is in discussion here is the future of humanity.

In putting forward practical measures and initiatives ori-

ented toward favoring human development, the Holy See “attempts to turn its own attention to certain *fundamental truths*: that every person, independently of their age, their sex, their religion, and their nationality, possesses an unconditioned and inalienable dignity and value; that human life itself, from the moment of conception until that of natural death, is sacred; that the rights of man are innate and independent of any constitutional order, and that the fundamental unity of the human race requires that all commit themselves to building a community free of injustice which struggles to promote and safeguard the common good” (John Paul II, Message to the Secretary General of the International Conference on Population and Development, 18-III-1994).

The draft of the final document of the Cairo conference . . . was defined in the New York PrepComm [preparatory committee] meeting which ended April 22. . . . Ten percent of the texts remain bracketed for lack of agreement. Some basic concepts remain bracketed throughout. . . .

Two chapters, concretely, present aspects which clash with the dignity of the person . . . Chapter 7, “Family Planning,” and Chapter 8, “Health, Morbidity, and Mortality.”

Chapter 7. Here is found the fundamental nucleus of the ideas which the Cairo conference proposes to promote. Already in New York the great difficulty of dealing with this chapter was evident.

At the base of these difficulties are found the two concepts of reproductive health and sexual health. . . . Both of them come from working documents of the WHO [World Health Organization] which, however, were not formally and definitively approved by this assembly. . . . Among the methods to promote this “reproductive health” . . . is cited the term “regulation of fertility” which includes abortion (according to the texts made available from the New York meeting). *Thus abortion is considered as an essential component of “reproductive health.”*

In Paragraph 7.4, access to “reproductive health” services is proposed for all individuals of all ages (hence, also for adolescents). And among the services for which availability is proposed there is abortion.

Obviously, it is not possible to maintain positions which accept abortion as an *essential dimension* of the health policies either at the national level or at the international level, much less as a part of international policies of *development*.

Some of the references to youth in this chapter have aroused strong perplexities among various delegations to the New York conference. It is stated, for example, that “reproductive health” services for adolescents should “safeguard their rights to privacy and intimacy. . . .” These efforts to affirm unlimited rights of adolescents and even of children to be sexually active and to be assisted in administrative centers by the state without any reference to the parents, are characteristic of a large part of the whole draft. . . .

It can be said that the two key concepts of this chapter—“reproductive health” and “sexual health”—are tremendously ambiguous. In the absence of a clarification, the concept

of “sexual health” could for example be applied to an entire series of sexual activities which by their nature are not reproductive, particularly homosexual relations. Since what is at stake is the declaration of rights which governments must support, this ambiguity is unacceptable. . . .

On abortion: The draft document considers the abortion issue under different aspects which can be grouped under three main points:

1. Abortion as a risk for women’s health. It has been often stated that the Cairo conference is dealing with abortion only to express concern about the many women who died because of abortion practiced in an unsafe manner, whether legally or not. Paragraph 8.25 deals with this argument, underlining that all efforts must be made to discourage abortion. But then the text asks governments to review their laws regarding abortion and to supply appropriate medical treatment to all women who decide to interrupt their pregnancy. . . .

We think that the risks to women’s health would be better resolved by increasing investments and augmenting the level of medical care rather than multiplying the recourse to abortion.

2. The right to abortion. The draft final document however, in treating the right to abortion, goes well beyond expressing concern about women’s health problems. The definition of “reproductive health” is found in Par. 7.1. and includes the phrase “the right . . . to safe, effective, accessible, and acceptable methods of fertility regulation of their own choosing.” The definitions of the World Health Organization note that the term “fertility regulation” includes both the concept of birth planning and abortion. Hence, every time that the expression reproductive health appears in the text, automatically it assumes the meaning of “right to safe, effective, accessible and acceptable abortion.”

The term accessible means that governments must subsidize abortion. In the text, this “right” is presented in a totally undefined way, thus accepting abortion for any reason and at any time in the pregnancy. . . . [This] sounds like abortion on demand.

Par. 7.4 urges governments to provide, by the year 2015, health care assistance in the reproduction area “to all individuals of all ages” and lists among the services to supply specifically, termination of pregnancy. [Thus], the “right to abortion” would also be extended to adolescents. Par. 7.43 in fact urges the nations to “remove the juridical, social, and other kinds of barriers placed on information and health care in the sexual and reproductive sector for adolescents . . . and such service for adolescents ought to assure their right to secrecy and confidentiality.” *Thus the right of parents and of the family to information on abortion for adolescents would be eliminated.*

3. Abortion and Family Planning: The expression in Par. 7.22 which underlines: “In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning”—taking note of the Recommendation of the Conference on Population and Cities in Mexico in 1984 and the legislative texts of many nations—

remains bracketed because of the pressing opposition of some western Nations. Many governments—among them, for example the U.S. administration—have said that they don't intend to accept abortion as a method of "family planning." And yet, they insisted that the preceding formulation remain bracketed.

We have read . . . the declaration on abortion by [Cairo conference secretary general] Mrs. Sadik: "We do not propose its legalization." Our reading of the document, which takes into consideration what I have said up to here, causes us to understand a quite different reality.

Al Azhar defends marriage, family

The Center for Islamic Research of Al Azhar University in Cairo, one of the oldest and most prestigious centers of Islamic teaching, denounced key aspects of the Cairo draft program in a statement issued Aug. 10.

The United Nations is about to hold its International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in September 1994 to discuss a draft program of action prepared earlier. In part, the program touches on issues pertaining to rules governing the family, marital and extramarital relations, the right to abortion, and adolescents' right to have sex.

A reading of the draft program reveals an abundance of loose expressions, imprecise terms, and new-fangled definitions indicating that the program tends toward principles that run counter to those Islam has established for the family and condones abortion in cases other than those approved by Islamic *shari'ah*. It also seeks to protect homosexual and well as heterosexual relationships outside the framework of a legitimate marriage, all of which destroy the moral principles defended by all Godly Religions, and encourages permissiveness and all the pernicious diseases transmitted by sexual conduct.

The Center for Islamic Research of Al Azhar, inspired by its responsibilities of spreading God's path through reasoning and good advice and motivated by its responsibility to clarify its views on social and other matters, met on . . . Aug. 4, 1994, to study the aforementioned program of action, and reached the following conclusions:

First, on the family: Islam regards the family [as] a source of serenity, love and mercy. It equalizes man and woman, who are equal in their humanity, and gives each of them the right to start and maintain a marriage as long as they respect God's laws. . . .

Islam requires us to educate children in the family with faith in God, His wisdom, and His will. This faith is the shield that safeguards each individual and guides his steps from childhood to old age. Islam makes man the keeper of the family, who provides for its needs, protects its youngsters, and teaches them to perform their prayers in order to guard them against indecent conduct and sin and protect them from going astray as a result of their lack of experience in a world full of temptation.

All these principles no doubt contrast with the attempt to discredit the family as the central nucleus of society as stated in Principle 10 of the draft. They also conflict with the demand that parents tolerate premarital sex among adolescents, and regard them as a secret with no right to parents to intervene. All this may encourage adolescents to follow their instincts and expose them to deadly diseases that spread through sexual contacts.

Second, on sexual relationships: Islam does not approve of any sexual relationship outside a legitimate marriage between a man and a woman. . . . Islam punishes with extreme severity fornication and homosexuality, even if practiced by mutually consenting adults. . . . All this because Islam cares—as do care other Godly Religions—for the stability of the society on the right path that ensures strength and pleasure socially, psychologically and health-wise.

Any relationship other than marriage, such as those mentioned in the fifth paragraph of Article V of the plan, contradicts Islam. So does the call for unmarried individuals to enjoy a satisfactory sexual life, as Article VII points out in its first and second paragraphs, and the call for sexual and pregnancy services—including family planning—to be made available to everybody without the need for marriage, as Article VII suggests in its third, fourth, sixth, and eighth paragraphs.

Third, on abortion: The Center for Islamic Research of Al Azhar concluded that abortion is totally prohibited even if conception was due to fornication or rape—unless it is medically necessary to save the life of the mother. This is because the mother is the source of life, and her life already has an independent life with rights and duties. The mother therefore should not be sacrificed for the sake of an unborn whose life has not yet been independently assured and remains yet a part of the mother's organs. Therefore permitting abortion in cases other than above contrasts with Islamic rules even if done under the name of family planning or sexual health or reproductive health.

That the Center for Islamic Research mentioned the above three issues in particular does not mean that the draft does not violate other points of the *sharia'ah*. It contains terms that suggest unacceptable things, such as equality between men and women in inheritance mentioned in Article IV, paragraph 17, and compelling governments and non-governmental organizations to raise the minimum age of marriage while securing alternatives to early marriage as proposed in paragraph 22 of Article IV, which could be understood as an incitement to prostitution.

Therefore the center calls upon the countries participating in the conference to amend the draft document and make its terms more concise so that they do not include—even by implication—what contradicts Islamic *shari'ah* and what is protected by other Godly Religions and what the values of Islamic nations throughout the ages have established.

. . . What attracts particular attention is the content of Article VII, with its various paragraphs. . . . In this regard, the council stresses that it rejects anything that violates Islam-

ic *shari'ah* and recommends that reservations be expressed about such things so that the Islamic nations will be committed to none of them.

Bishop McHugh hits population controllers

Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, N.J., delivered a harsh critique of the Cairo agenda in a speech to the annual convention of the Knights of Columbus in early August. An adviser to the Vatican on population issues, Bishop McHugh will be the only U.S. prelate on the Vatican delegation to the Cairo conference.

. . . [Pope] John Paul II has taken a highly visible role in countering the proposals for Cairo. . . .

Unquestionably, the church is expressing opposition to many of the pernicious ideas in the Draft Agenda and is attempting to garner the support of other nations in restoring some sense of moral and ethical integrity to the deliberations and to the final document. There are many nations, especially in the developing and particularly Latin America, that are in general agreement with the Holy See. There are other nations, largely in western Europe, that are looking for ways to shape some type of consensus. But the bulwark of obstruction is the United States of America, whose representatives are single-minded, hard-headed and intransigent, and who are using both the power and prestige of this nation to ensure the agreement and support of other nations for the so-called American point of view. . . .

I will highlight the differences of approach and of conviction between the United States and the Holy See. . . . We should know and spread the word about the radical nature of the U.S. approach, and present another approach that is supportive of human dignity and the common good. Finally, we should contact our elected representatives and express our position clearly and forcefully in the press and on TV and radio. . . .

The conference is the International Conference on Population and *Development*. Out of 118 pages, six pages discuss the interrelationships between population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development. The U.S., one of the wealthiest and most technologically competent nations in the world, has a special responsibility to assist developing nations, but that responsibility is often limited by self-interest and by the absence of a foreign policy based on sound principles and moral commitments. The . . . basic thesis [of the program] is that if women are to become participants in the development process, they must be given absolute and total autonomy in controlling conception and birth. . . . This is good news for the population controllers, who take the position that sustainable development can only be achieved by sharply limiting population growth and maintaining definite limits (and for some, decreasing the present number of human beings on Earth).

Placing the burden on women then takes child-bearing and child-rearing out of the context of marriage and family

life; it reduces the value of the child as a person and a family member; . . . it works against the good of society and its obligations to support the family. . . .

To achieve absolute autonomy for women, the Draft Agenda shifts the focus to sexual and reproductive rights. . . . This in turn escalates the worldwide need for permissive abortion policies. . . .

Thus at PrepComm III there was a concerted effort, led by the U.S.A., to reverse the U.N. policy reached by consensus at the 1984 [Mexico City] conference which stated that "governments are urged . . . to take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning."

The determined objective of the U.S. was to gain international approval for making abortion available to any woman who wants it, at any stage of pregnancy and for any reason whatsoever. . . . The documents under consideration used terms such as reproductive rights, safe motherhood, fertility regulation and elimination of unwanted pregnancy to pave the way for access to abortion on demand. Efforts by the Holy See to clarify the precise meaning of these terms, or to state clearly that they did not include abortion, were steadfastly opposed and rejected by the United States of America, with the support and cooperation of U.N. officials. . . .

The U.S.A. insists on universal access to all methods of family planning, which includes sterilization and abortion for all, including adolescents. . . . The Holy See . . . calls instead for education in responsible parenthood, which includes the formation of proper moral values and attitudes toward sexuality, marriage, and parenthood. Adolescents have no right to be sexually active; they can and should be persuaded to be chaste, and society has a duty to oppose sexual permissiveness for the common good as well as for the good of individual persons.

The U.S.A. asserts its interest in strengthening the family, but is vague on what it means by "family." . . . The Cairo document is weak in affirming society's duty to uphold the family. . . . The agenda document describes the family as "the basic unit of society." It also speaks of the family in all its forms or the plurality of forms of family life. These terms are not carefully defined. . . .

In the month left before the Cairo conference, there will be continued debate about the goals and possible achievements of the conference. I have read the statements of American leaders, including President Clinton, Secretary of State Christopher, Ambassador Tim Wirth who has been the chief spokesman and most radical proponent of many of the American points, and I have heard how the U.S. position is understood by foreign diplomats. I am in no way optimistic.

Add to this the cacophony of voices coming from non-government organizations such as Planned Parenthood, National Abortion Rights Action League and Catholics for a Free Choice, and we see American policy decided not by elected representatives but by powerful vested interest groups.