

Vatican spokesman gives Cairo briefing

The following is the text of a briefing on the Cairo conference, given by Dr. Joaquín Navarro-Valls, director of the Holy See Press Office, on Aug. 31, 1994. It was supplied to EIR by the Vatican Mission to the U.N., and does not include the question and answer section of the press conference:

The Holy See delegation to the International Conference on Population and Development is going to Cairo with the idea of making a contribution to obtaining a document of consensus. Never, on the part of the Holy See, was the idea ever considered not to participate in the work of the International Conference on Population and Development. It is in fact opportune to recall that the presence of the Holy See has been assiduous and constant in all the regional preparatory meetings. The Holy See thus feels strongly involved in the formulation of the principles and the working out of solutions in this international meeting.

The Holy See is well aware of the complexity of the problems connected with the material and moral development of mankind. But, at the same time, it knows it is acting in a field which does not regard joint, ideological, geopolitical or sectorial interests. The themes which will be discussed in Cairo touch on, in a particular way, the respect for and dignity of each human person.

This awareness of the Holy See also comes from the concrete situations in which the church operates—through, for example, her 21,757 worldwide health institutions, 1,800 of which are found in Africa alone. It is in these receiving points, in the service of women, maternity, childhood, and whoever is found to be suffering, that the church feels and proclaims day by day the inviolable right to dignity given to each member of the human family.

It is also on these bases that the Holy See feels it can and must state—in Cairo as in every other circumstance—that the multiple solutions which can be applied to solving the complex human problems, cannot go against, nor violate, nor much less humiliate the rights and dignity of the human person.

Together with the complexity of the problem, the Holy See is not unaware of the positive aspects contained in the draft document of the Cairo conference. But at the same time the Holy See cannot be silent on the serious lacks, the imprecisions and the ambiguities of language, the unproven statements and the very social philosophy which is in the draft document which will be soon discussed at the Cairo conference.

Ambiguity of language

What cannot be passed over in silence is the ambiguous language which runs through a great part of the draft document and is found especially in the points which constitute the fundamental nucleus of the ideas which the conference is proposing to promote. Once again today, on the vigil of the opening of the work, reference must be made to several concrete examples. The first regards the concepts of “reproductive health” and of “sexual health,” two terms which appear more than 100 times in the draft document, and are quoted exclusively from working documents of the World Health Organization, without having ever been approved by WHO itself or by other international assemblies. It can again be observed how too often, in the draft document, one makes reference to “rights” never sanctioned nor recognized by the international community.

Emblematic of this is the case of Para. 7.1 on “reproductive health” which, while containing some elements that can be appreciated, also contains reference to “the right to have access to methods of fertility regulation. It is, in effect, abortion on demand, since in the definition of the World Health Organization—according to texts presented in the third preparatory conference of New York—the term “fertility regulation” includes abortion. Abortion is thus considered as an essential component of “reproductive health.” In the repeated ambiguity of this language is excluded every limitation to abortion which is proposed as a possibility in whatever moment of the pregnancy and for whatever reason.

One must recall in this regard that there is no form whatsoever of international consensus on a generic “right to abortion.” Such a “right” could, precisely, be deduced from several of the statements contained—sometimes in an implicit way, other times explicitly—[in] the draft document.

Mr. Al Gore, vice president of the U.S.A., and member of the American delegation, recently stated that “the United States have never sought, nor do they seek nor will they seek to establish an international right to abortion.” The draft document, which has the U.S. administration as its principal sponsor, contradicts, in reality, Mr. Gore’s statement.

The imprecision, the approximation of terms is not just a matter of lexicon terminology. Treating as it does of rights to be inserted into the norms and laws of single countries, it seems necessary to study more deeply and completely to give a precise and definite meaning to concepts which concern human behavior which have deep cultural and ethical implications. Among the language ambiguities must be singled out the statement—in Para. 7—on “reproductive rights” as a prerogative of “couples and individuals.” What meaning can such a concept have? It would be justified to think that such a biological absurdity can legitimize the will of man to “subdue” the woman to satisfy his “reproductive rights.”

Also in this chapter one finds the extremely loose and selective use of statistics, both in the order of population growth as well as moral conduct and to the not-reached objec-

tives of "family planning" programs. The technical role of the U.N.'s Division for Population would thus seem changed around. The entire scientific apparatus of the means of statistical surveys, judging from references in the draft document, appears totally inadequate and shows that it needs a complete revision.

The family

If ambiguity of language runs all through the draft document, it is more explicitly so—in the negative—regarding the consideration of the family.

This—I must emphasize—is one of the great concerns of the Holy Father. In fact, in the document there exists the tendency to identify, and then to assimilate the term with expressions that humiliate not only its nature but also its social and biological function. Next to the family, one finds the reference to phrases such as "in its every form." It is not a casual fact that consequently an institution so natural, fundamental, and universal as marriage, is practically absent in the document text. Family, procreation, and marriage are treated in the draft with an equal diffidence, as if it were dealing with three independent variables.

In referring to adolescents and youth, the draft document shows the most glaring limitations, above all on sexuality. The vision indicated is that of an exaggerated individualism, which does not leave any room for a dimension of interpersonal relationships. The sole preoccupation of the document seems to be to affirm the right of everyone to live the sexuality according to their own lifestyle.

It is on this level that the draft proposes consequently the affirmation of practically unlimited sexual rights not only to adolescents, but also to children. Besides all public institutions or assistance centers, there is not any reference in this section to the role of parents. There is, instead, the desire to cancel out all responsibility on the part of mothers and fathers, asking governments explicitly to "remove every social barrier to sexual health and to information and medical assistance to adolescents." The medical assistance that the draft asks of governments includes abortions. And it affirms that these "health services" "must" safeguard the "right of adolescents to privacy, to confidentiality and to respect" (Par. 7.43). This formulation would take away the rights of parents and the family to be informed not only of the access to contraception but also to abortion by adolescents.

[The draft program] deals with concepts absolutely unreconcilable not only with the Christian ethic, but also with the most elementary rights of the person as they are expressed in the culture and the social formations of millions of people throughout the world. They are obscure points that prevent the whole document from offering a view equal to a humanity called to face the road toward the future.

Also, in the title of the conference, there is a reference to the future, where it speaks—for the first time—of development besides population. Yet one fact betrays the depth of

such a projection: In the 113 pages of the draft on development there are only seven actually dedicated to it.

We should remember that population policies are only a part of development policy. In fact, they include the whole gamut of areas: nutrition, medicine, agriculture, education, demographics, economics, and politics, together with more profound aspects, moral and spiritual dimensions. True development will not be respected if only demographic data is considered as the obstacle to development.

We must also remember that the more developed countries have balanced the relationship between population and resources through the use of all these elements, without recourse to any brutal formulas that in this draft are being paradoxically proposed for countries less developed.

Those are some of the concepts that risk transforming the Cairo Conference into a session called to sanction a lifestyle current in minority circles of certain opulent societies and which propose—or impose—as a universal model and as social philosophies to all humanity of today.

More unacceptable still is the pretense of presenting this operation of social engineering under the category of human rights. In reality what strongly emerges from the whole draft is exactly this fact: the will to impose these points of view, as the dominant ideas of all political societies. And this without being respectful to the emerging, less developed cultures of our society. This is basically the theme of the Cairo Conference.

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