

# Planned Parenthood seeks debate

By Patricia Zapor  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The International Planned Parenthood Federation, which promotes artificial birth control and supports legal abortion, has asked Pope John Paul II for "a sensitive dialogue" on family planning.

In a letter timed to coincide with World Population Day July 11, the organization's president, Dr. Fred Sai of Ghana, said Planned Parenthood has stood for values similar to those of the church in supporting human rights, but called for a dialogue on family planning as the best protection "against abortion."

A U.S. bishop who is a member of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops told Catholic News Service July 9 he considered the letter "a public relations effort" on the part of the federation.

In his letter Sai said that "the Catholic Church has helped to add a human and a spiritual dimension to the debate" on the growing world population, consumption habits and damaging technologies.

"The church has rightly stressed the need for economic justice ... supported human rights in many settings ... sided with the poor and campaigned for transitions to democracy. It has joined in efforts to alleviate the load on those afflicted by disaster and denied their social rights. Above all, perhaps, it has attributed value to individual human beings in an inhuman period," the letter continued.

Sai noted that for 40 years the International Planned Parenthood Federation "has stood for similar values," driven by concern for health and welfare of women,

their children and their families.

Planned Parenthood agencies support legal abortion and in some jurisdictions provide abortion services. In the United States, Planned Parenthood is leading a legislative battle to reverse a recent Supreme Court ruling that prohibits agencies that advocate abortion as a method of family planning from receiving federal funds for their programs.

In his letter Sai said that with regard to birth control, which he called "one aspect of human rights and development, the contemporary Catholic Church has chosen to be an obstacle rather than an ally. The opposition of the church to contraception (other than periodic abstinence) and the vehemence with which this opposition has been expressed, unfortunately overshadows so much on which we can agree."

Catholic teaching rejects artificial contraception as the obstruction of the natural life-giving power of the sexual act. Natural family planning methods are the only forms of birth regulation that conform with church teaching.

Sai said recent statements from the church likening legal abortion to the Nazi holocaust and stating that the birth control pill and other forms of contraception have enslaved women "show the deepest misunderstanding of the family planning movement."

He went on to say half a million women die from causes related to pregnancy and millions more "live lives blighted by chronic anemia and ill health," and that such deaths and illness could be prevented through "low cost, effective contraception used by women who do not want further children.

"On this significant day, I humbly suggest that a sensitive dialogue should be opened between the church and those who believe as I do that voluntary family planning is the best protection against abortion, as well as a major contributor to saving women's lives and a human right," Sai wrote.

Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, N.J., a member of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, called the letter "a public relations effort" on the part of the federation and, noting that he has no way of knowing how the Vatican would respond, said he does not expect the overture to lead to a dialogue between the Catholic Church and the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

There was no immediate comment from the Vatican on the letter.

"The church has addressed issues of population growth and decline in the context of its teaching on the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of marriage and the importance of understanding human sexuality as a gift from God," Bishop McHugh said in a statement.

Bishop McHugh noted that the suffering of women and children in developing nations "is not attributable simply to population growth or the absence of birth control services." Lack of prenatal care, proper nutrition and health care are responsible for many problems and the church has supported international efforts to overcome those deficiencies, he said.

Also, he said, "IPPF speaks for itself in proposing the small-child family as the worldwide norm. That is not the cultural norm of many nations."



AP/Wide World Photos  
**CROATIAN CONFLICT — A Croat militiaman searches the burned-out rubble of the house of a Serbian separatist who died during a shootout in Osijek, Yugoslavia, July 11. Authorities of the breakaway Croatian republic said the house had been a sanctuary for Serbian terrorists and a storage site for their weapons.**



AP/Wide World Photos  
**REMAINS OF THE BERLIN WALL — A visitor to a cemetery at the former boundary between East and West Berlin walks along the Berlin Wall July 12. Thirty years after it was built and nearly two years after it was broken, the Berlin Wall is still falling.**

## Pastoral on women in the church a 'precarious task,' bishop says

BONN, Germany (CNS) — A German bishop who participated in the Vatican-sponsored consultation on the U.S. bishops' pastoral on women called the project a "precarious undertaking," according to news reports.

Bishop Walter Kasper of Rottenburg-Stuttgart said the second draft of the pastoral, the version discussed at the May 28-29 meeting, would have to "disappoint both sides" because it could not satisfy critical American women, nor do full justice to church doctrine.

The pastoral focused on the dignity and equality of women and urged opening to women all church positions not requiring ordination. The letter said that all forms of sexism and discrimination against women in the church and society are sinful.

The meeting was an international panel of bishops from 13 countries, Vatican officials and two women observers. The Vatican secretary of state, then-Archbishop Angelo Sodano, now a cardinal, said the

meeting aimed at helping the U.S. prelates put church teaching on women into modern idiom without "betraying anything of the integrity and originality of the Christian message."

One observer, Susan Muto, a professor of theology at Pittsburgh's Duquesne University, expressed a "general concern" among Vatican officials and some bishops that the pastoral could be overly influenced by what the churchmen "naively labeled as radical feminism."

German observers said that the non-American bishops in the consultation might have been uncomfortable with the generally more open process of policy formation practiced by the U.S. bishops — particularly in obtaining major input from the laity and the public nature of most of their meetings and votes.

A pastoral on women is not on the German bishops' list of priorities, according to German church officials.

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