

Holy See

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Observers on all sides agreed that the April meeting was the scene for some of the most vehement opposition ever voiced to church teaching on family planning. According to church officials, many delegates seemed to prefer letting the church knock at the U.N. doors unanswered, rather than to let the Vatican voice its views inside.

The Catholic Church's opposition to abortion, artificial birth control and to the language of the draft document made the church a primary target for criticism at the meeting, according to Gail Quinn, executive director of the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and a member of the Holy See's delegation.

In particular, Quinn said, church spokesmen were derided by members of several NGOs devoted to the promotion of legalized abortion and artificial birth control.

"What was very unusual from my perspective ... was the open manner in which the hostility was expressed," Quinn said in a phone interview with the *Catholic Courier* from Washington,

D.C. "Some of the NGOs sitting in the balcony were booing and hissing."

Why a United Nations meeting on population in 1994 would be marked by the booing and hissing of representatives can be explained, in part, by examining the ICPD and the church's position on population control.

Previous conferences in Mexico City and Bucharest focused primarily on population issues, Payton said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*. But the Cairo conference embodies the growing consensus among many observers that population, development and environmental concerns are linked, he said. Such thinking is reflected in the 113-page draft "Programme of Action" that the ICPD will consider in Cairo, he added.

"There's virtually no aspect of human activity not covered," he explained.

The *Catholic Courier* obtained a copy of the latest draft of the document from the United Nations.

In addition to its preamble and statement of principles, the Programme of Action contains sections covering such topics as the relationship between population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development; gender equality, equity and empowerment of women; the family, its roles, composition and

structure; and reproductive rights, sexual and reproductive health and family planning.

Just what the document means by such terms as "reproductive rights" forms the core of the Catholic Church's criticisms of the upcoming ICPD. Many church officials interpret "reproductive rights" to include abortion, a practice clearly condemned by the church as murder.

Such interpretations earned the church the apparent enmity of population-control proponents.

In addition to the derisive anti-papal cartoon, the Vatican delegation and representatives of church-related groups also saw sharp hostility in articles published by *The Earth Times*, an unofficial newspaper distributed inside the United Nations. The publication focused on such areas of U.N. activity as environmental and development issues.

The Earth Times is published by Theodore H. Kheel, formerly a prominent New York City labor negotiator and currently chairman of a group called Eminent Citizens Committee for Cairo '94. The paper's funding comes from such corporations as Apple Computer, such news organizations as the Los Angeles Times Syndicate and the New York Times Foundation, and such foundations as Rockefeller and MacArthur.

The April 8 issue carried an article by Werner Fornos, president of the Washington-based Population Institute, suggesting that the the Vatican should be excluded from the United Nations for attempting "to impose religious dogma on non-Catholics."

"At some point the Vatican's actions may well raise questions about the justification for its having the unique privilege of representation at the United Nations," Fornos said.

Criticism of the church even came from U.N. leaders at the ICPD preparatory committee meeting.

For example, the conference's General Secretary, Nafis Sadik, said a few delegations raised questions about terms such as "reproductive health," "fertility regulation" and even "safe motherhood."

Then, Sadik noted that those who challenged the terminology had suggested that it might be understood to imply abortion on demand. But she said the words were used in accordance with definitions of the World Health Organization, and these "made it clear they did not" mean abortion on demand.

"The use of the term abortion may have been a smoke screen to disguise opposition to the ultimate goal of ICPD — empowering women, and men, to make their own reproductive choices and to be able to plan the course of their lives," she said of church efforts.

"That is patent nonsense," said Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, N.J., a member of the Holy See's delegation. Bishop McHugh represented the Vatican at the population conferences held in Bucharest in 1974 and Mexico City in 1984, and said he presumed he would go to Cairo.

Such a disputed term as "fertility regulation" has been interpreted in some W.H.O. literature to include contraception, sterilization and abortion, he said. The Vatican delegation, he said, approved "reproductive health" if properly defined.

He said Ms. Sadik was being disingenuous in suggesting there could be nothing objectionable in another term, "safe motherhood." Some literature circulating at the meeting listed abortion among the services needed to assure

"safe motherhood," he said.

To indicate the lack of agreement, the disputed terms were put in brackets in the Programme of Action to be submitted to the Cairo conference for decision there, Sadik said.

The preparatory committee operated by consensus, but voting will probably be the means of deciding issues in Cairo, Sadik said. Although the Vatican is entitled to vote at the international conferences of U.N. agencies, its permanent-observer status does not give it a vote in the U.N. General Assembly.

Many church officials, including the pope, have expressed concern that the conference will decide to sanction family planning methods that will harm the integrity of families and the morality of adolescents.

"We would come down much more in favor of development, rather than promoting organizations that push birth control," Quinn said.

Her statement echoed a position paper on population and ecology issued by the Vatican in 1992.

"(The) less populated nations of the North are directly or indirectly responsible for most of the abuse of the global environment," the paper said. "Therefore, policies aimed at reducing population do little to help solve problems of environment and development. True solutions to these problems must involve not only sound economic planning and technology, but justice for all the peoples of the earth."

ICPD defenders contend that the draft Programme of Action does address development issues in one section, and that calls for the promotion of female education can be seen as part of humanity's overall development.

Even more so, however, the ICPD's defenders assert that the conference will actually promote much-needed alternatives to the millions of legal and illegal abortions that take place worldwide each year.

In fact, the document even singles out the high worldwide rates of abortion of female fetuses and of female infanticide as phenomena to be abhorred, Payton said.

"There is a real concern that sex selection is leading to the abortion of female fetuses," he commented.

In defense of the draft document, Payton claimed that church officials had made many false accusations about its contents. The document rejects coercive family planning by governments, and even promotes abstinence — along with artificial birth control — as methods of population control, he noted.

He also refuted contentions that document's language on reproductive rights contains hidden endorsements of sterilization and abortion.

"It's very difficult to deal with people who see shadows everywhere," he complained of the Holy See.

Yet if the church sees shadows, it does so because the U.N. has previously cited abortion as a method of "fertility regulation," Quinn and McHugh both argued.

Despite the arguments over language, both Payton and Quinn predicted that the Cairo conference would reaffirm the 1984 Mexico City conference's rejection of abortion as a method of family planning.

"Very few delegations expressed the wish to see abortion universally legalized," Payton claimed.

Quinn did caution, however, that the section reaffirming Mexico City's rejection of abortion was printed in brackets in the current ICPD Programme of Action draft.

"That means that question's still on the floor," she said.

Contains reporting from *Catholic News Service*.

O'Briens leave

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behold, at the first meeting I was elected the chair."

Judith later helped create the Women's Scholarship Committee at St. Bernard's Institute, joined the diocesan Stewardship Council — an advisory body serving Bishop Matthew H. Clark, and on which O'Brien has lobbied for more women — and the board of directors of the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry (now the Catholic Family Center).

In her honor, the Catholic Family Center this spring created the Judith O'Brien Endowed Fund for Professional Enhancement and Enrichment.

While Judith has been involved with the community, Dennis has been tied up with his duties at the University of Rochester — finding time to write and to preach at area churches, and to publish collections of his sermons. Ironically, because of church rules governing preaching, O'Brien did not preach at a Catholic church until the weekend of June 25-26, 1994, when he spoke at the Newman Community Masses at the University of Rochester.

Although he has worked for secular

colleges, Dennis acknowledged that religion always has played a role in what he has done, albeit a quiet one.

Religious people can take one of two paths when dealing with the world, he explained. Some takes the prophetic role of Dorothy Day — for whom both O'Briens expressed admiration — or the Quakers of colonial Pennsylvania, who, he explained, all resigned from the government rather than arrange for troops to fight Native Americans attacking frontier settlements.

"That's always a critical issue for people in public life," Dennis O'Brien said. "Do you stay in public office with the inevitable compromises? Or do you take a prophetic stand."

The Catholic Church, he continued, has a history of seeking compromise where it is possible.

"It's one of the things I applaud about Catholicism," he said. "It seems to me that's its genius. It's been very adaptive, it's been able to be in dialogue with the world."

Dennis O'Brien hopes to continue his own "dialogue with the world" through his writing — and with his family — in retirement.

"I've been in administration since 1961 — it's very demanding in terms of time," he said. "I think it's only fair to have a little more time to be family."

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