

Population document's wording scrutinized

CAIRO, Egypt (CNS) — A Vatican spokesman said a proposal by a World Health Organization official might help resolve church objections to parts of a draft U.N. document on population and development.

The spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, also read a two-page statement to the press Sept. 6 to clarify the Vatican's objections as the U.N. International Conference on Population and Development worked through its second day of deliberations.

"While the draft document contains many positive elements, the Holy See cannot give explicit or implicit support to those parts of the document regarding abortion, the weakening of several family-related terminologies, the effective encouragement among adolescents of a liberal sexual lifestyle free of parental rights with no reference to ethical values, all of which in the long term can only bring damage to individuals and society," Navarro-Valls said.

At the Sept. 5-13 conference, some 170 countries were working to forge a nonbinding "Program of Action" on population and development. About 10 percent of the language in the document was contested at preparatory meetings in April.

Navarro-Valls in separate remarks mentioned a proposal from Dr. Hiroshi Nakajima, president of the World Health Organization, who suggested dropping any reference to "fertility regulation" and replacing it with the phrase, "culturally appropriate family planning services."

"Maybe we can agree with that," Navarro-Valls said. One of the Vatican's objections has been that phrases such as "reproductive health" and "fertility regulation" are understood to include abortion.

In a speech to the conference, U.S. Vice President Al Gore reiterated earlier remarks denying that the United States seeks an international right to abortion. He made similar comments in Washington in late August.

On Sept. 6 Gore met with the Vatican ambassador to the United Nations, Archbishop Renato Martino. The vice president later told reporters he did not expect the Vatican to sign the final document.

Responding to Gore's statement, Navarro-Valls told reporters, "the Vatican came here to work for a consensus document."

After the vice president's August speech, Navarro-Valls said the draft doc-

ument, supported by the United States, "contradicts the words of Vice President Gore."

However, Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, N.J., a member of the U.S. delegation, expressed optimism following both of Gore's speeches.

The vice president's remarks "certainly indicate a change in policy and attitude" since preparatory meetings in April, Bishop McHugh told *The Washington Post* Sept. 5.

The previous day, on NBC's *Meet the Press*, Bishop McHugh said current U.S. government advocacy of abortion "would be a powerful incentive to American Catholics to walk away from the Democratic Party as well as the Clinton administration."

As the conference got under way, Pope John Paul II said world population growth is a real challenge but must not be approached by the "dangerous shortcut" of reducing birth rates at any cost.

Instead, the world needs to focus more attention on the "scandalous contrast" between the rich and poor populations of the globe, he said at his sum-

mer villa outside Rome Sept. 4.

The pope said it was certainly true that the world's population was increasing at a notable rate, especially in poor countries, and that this poses a challenge to social and economic development for future generations.

But he said other contributing factors are not always sufficiently emphasized — in particular, that "the gap is growing between the society of well-being and the immense multitude of poor." The Cairo conference represents a "historic occasion" to tackle this problem, he said.

The accent should be on redistributing resources to favor economic and social development among the disadvantaged populations, he said.

"It is necessary to resist the temptation of a dangerous shortcut: that of an all-out effort to reduce birth rates through whatever means possible," he said.

Population planning programs are acceptable, but only if they follow precise ethical conditions and respect basic values and rights which "politics can never subvert," he said.

Concerns over security nix pontiff's visit to Sarajevo

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II canceled plans to visit Sarajevo in war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina because security could not be guaranteed, the Vatican said.

The Vatican's announcement Sept. 6 came less than 48 hours before the pontiff was to arrive in Sarajevo for a one-day visit. The decision followed a series of high-level contacts between Vatican, U.N. and Bosnian officials.

The pope was "saddened" at being forced to call the trip off, and he planned to visit the city "as soon as conditions permit," the Vatican said.

The statement said the pope had al-

ways underlined the need for safety assurances for the people who were expected to attend Masses and other events during the Sept. 8 visit.

"Unfortunately, it has so far been impossible to have such guarantees, despite the numerous contacts undertaken with all interested parties," the Vatican said.

Bosnian Serbs surrounding the city had refused to guarantee Pope John Paul's safety.

Another factor in the decision to delay the trip was concern that a papal visit at this time might "be poorly understood and add to tensions," the statement said.

The Vatican said it would continue contacts in order to work out a future date for the visit.



AP/Wide World Photos

Tears for slain Haitian priest

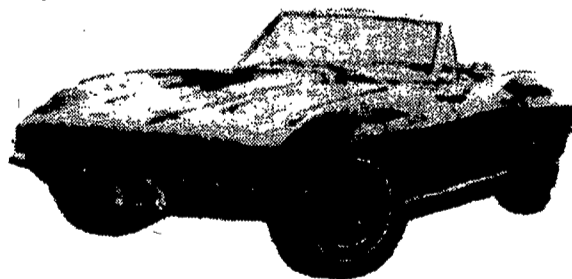
A woman religious wipes her eyes as mourners stand in line during a funeral at the Port-au-Prince church where Montfort Father Jean-Marie Marie Vincent was killed Aug. 28. Father Vincent, a friend of exiled Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was gunned down by unidentified gunmen.

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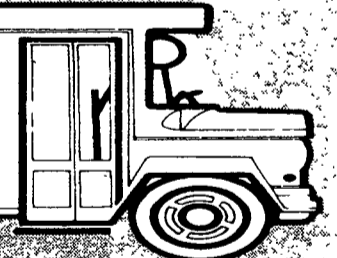
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