

Vatican gives partial OK to Cairo document

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

CAIRO, Egypt — After a week of sometimes acrimonious debate at the International Conference on Population and Development, the Vatican said it would partially endorse the conference's final document, but it rejected sections which it said contained language and concepts on abortion and sexual values it did not condone.

"The Holy See wishes in some way to join the consensus even if in an incomplete or partial manner," the Vatican said at the final session of the U.N. population conference.

The conference adopted a 113-page "Program of Action" Sept. 13, setting goals to limit population growth for the next 20 years, after the Vatican declared its partial approval.

Conference chairman Maher Mahran, Egypt's Minister of State for Population and Family Affairs, announced the adoption of the document without objection. The text to be known as the 1994 declaration will be passed on to the U.N. General Assembly.

The Vatican claimed a big victory when participants agreed to formally reject abortion as a method of family planning Sept. 9. But it remained deeply disappointed that a reference to legal abortion remained in the text.

Delegates to the U.N.-sponsored conference in Cairo also faced disagreements over the definition of the family, the term "reproductive health" and a proposed right of migrants to reunite with their families.

On another crucial issue, the Vati-

can criticized the conference's plans for future funding, saying most of the money will go toward population control and relatively little to development.

The verbal battles overshadowed the fact that 90 percent of the "Program of Action" has drawn widespread support — including the Vatican's — for its promotion of women's health, improved education, reduction of child and maternal mortality, and greater international economic balance.

Abortion quickly moved to center stage of the Sept. 5-13 conference in opening-day speeches by two women. Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway called for a general legalization of abortion, saying the alternative was suffering for women.

But Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, reflecting Muslim sentiments, said the draft document tries to "impose adultery, sex education ... and abortion" on all countries. "The Holy book (Koran) tells us, 'Kill not your children on a plea of want. We provide sustenance,'" she said.

According to one delegate, Marilyn Pryor of New Zealand, Bhutto's remarks "swung the conference on the first day. It was a very good speech and it reflected the mainstream position."

The Vatican, however, was often portrayed as the lone holdout to consensus on the abortion language. Vatican officials dismissed this as propaganda and pointed to more than a dozen countries that backed reform of the text.

"We didn't want to come here and make abortion the center of the conference," said Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls. But because it

was not dealt with adequately by drafters of the "Program of Action," the abortion issue exploded, he said.

After a full week of wrangling, the result was a paragraph whose first line read: "In no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning." That effectively restored language adopted at a similar conference in Mexico in 1984. The Vatican had lobbied hard to reinstate the phrase, against the opposition of many Western delegations.

Archbishop Renato R. Martino, head of the Vatican delegation, called it a "great victory." Monsignor Peter Elliott, another Vatican delegate, said the decision was "a great gain, a great success" that had "made the feminists angry."

Enthusiasm was tempered because the same paragraph stated that "in circumstances in which abortion is not against the law, abortion should be safe." The Vatican opposed any wording that could imply a legal right to abortion and had warned that this was a goal of some groups at the Cairo conference.

Monsignor Diarmuid Martin, the Vatican's chief negotiator in Cairo, emphasized to delegates that "for moral reasons, shared by citizens of many nations, (the Holy See) does not endorse legal abortion."

Bishop James T. McHugh of Camden, N.J., a member of the Vatican delegation, said he was happy over the restored language excluding abortion as a method of family planning, but was worried about the "negative aspects" that remain.

Another Vatican delegate, Gail Quinn, pro-life director for the U.S.

bishops, said she was not happy with the final text on abortion. "It could be much better" if the reference to legal abortion were removed, she said.

Other important elements of the paragraph were fully supported by the Vatican. They included the need to provide quality medical care for complications arising from abortion, educational and counseling services aimed at preventing abortion, and support for women with difficult pregnancies.

The final abortion language left some population control organizations less than happy, too. Asked about the discontent, Fred Sai of Ghana, a doctor who chaired the main committee, said there was "frustration, anger and concern about the extent to which we bent over backward" to satisfy the objections of the Vatican and other countries.

With the abortion debate put aside, the conference hit a potentially bigger snag Sept. 10 on the question of allowing the families of migrant workers to come to the countries where the workers are employed. Western countries, including the United States, supported reuniting migrant families but did not want it enshrined as a right in the Cairo document.

Many Third World countries, supported by the Vatican, objected. They said the debate revealed a split in the conference between the richer nations, where many migrants go, and poorer ones, where many come from. Vatican spokesman Navarro-Valls said the impasse, which surfaced in the final hours of debate on the text, showed that abortion was clearly not the only contested issue at the conference.

Limping pope talks of bold strides for peace in Croatia

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

ZAGREB, Croatia — Pope John Paul II walked with a limp during his Balkan visit, but he talked about bold strides for peace as he preached in the former Yugoslavia.

During a Sept. 10-11 trip to Zagreb, the pope advocated forgiveness and tolerance among the region's warring ethnic factions.

The pope said he came as "the pilgrim of reconciliation" to emphasize the common ties of language and Slavic origins that should unite Serbian Orthodox, Croatian Catholics and Bosnian Muslims.

It was the pope's first trip to the ex-Yugoslavia, and he told Croatian Catholics to take the lead in peace efforts.

The visit lasted slightly more than 24 hours, and the 74-year-old pope showed fatigue throughout, a sign that he has not fully recuperated after a fall last April resulted in reconstructive surgery to repair a broken right thigh bone.

While his voice was firm, his steps were small and shuffling.

The pope continued walking with the limp and black cane that have become common sights in his public appearances.

His traditional kneeling on the airport tarmac to kiss the ground upon arrival was replaced by two young people holding up a bowl of Croatian soil for the pope to kiss.

The overnight visit was the pope's first trip outside Italy in a year and a much shorter version of what the pope wanted. He had hoped to make a sym-

bolically unifying trip to Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.

Security risks made the pope give up his Sept. 8 trip to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo, and Serbian Orthodox Church objections blocked a visit to Belgrade, the Serbian capital.

The pope showed frustration that the ethnic and religious hatreds sparking the conflict in the former Yugoslavia obstructed his desire to be a catalyst for peace.

Sarajevo is "the martyred city that I ardently wanted to visit," he said in his airport arrival speech.

"For too long war has been raging in a land where the inhabitants for centuries were accustomed to reciprocal tolerance and exemplary collaboration," he said.

"To stop the bloody fratricidal war I

tried every means, I have knocked at every door," he added. "The Holy See is continuing to adopt every means to overcome the existing tensions."

Without a spirit of reciprocal forgiveness and tolerance, war "smolders under the ashes of fragile treaties," he said.

At a Sept. 11 outdoor Mass, the pope rejected blaming religious differences as a cause for war and stressed common denominators.

"It is not legitimate to attribute to religion the phenomenon of nationalistic intolerance which is raging in this region," he said at his only Mass during the trip.

Religious belief "must return to be a unifying and beneficial force," he said to more than 750,000 people gathered to hear him.

Respect Life Supplement

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