



Workers crowd aboard public transport in Nairobi, Kenya. An overloaded transportation system is one result of Kenya's population growth rate, long one of the world's highest.



Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro Valls, left, addresses the media alongside Monsignor Monged El-Hachemy from Lebanon, during a news conference at the U.N. Population Conference in Cairo.



Mooai Lek points out to her 3-year-old son Ben some of the rubbish under their one-room wooden shack in Bangkok's Klong Toey slum.

Cairo

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ference organizers. Yet in the end, many delegates, even opponents, praised the Vatican's role as a positive and constructive one.

It was an ironic twist that the Vatican, which came into the conference accused of forming an "unholy alliance" with radical Muslims in Iran, watched as the United States worked closely with Iranian delegates to reach consensus on several tricky religious issues. The head of the U.S. delegation, Timothy Wirth, ended up singing Iran's praises as a mediator.

One of the most important results of Vatican-Muslim pressure was insertion of a simple line stating that the "Program of Action" should be implemented "with full respect for the various religious and ethical values" of local cultures. In effect, this allowed many countries to endorse the document while distancing themselves from specific provisions on abortion, extramarital sex and other issues.

The Vatican's own decision to join the consensus "partially" while clearly stating its objections to some chapters was an astute tactical move. It meant the Holy See would not stand alone in outright opposition to the document. At the same time, it underscored the fact that many other countries were expressing reservations, too.

In this sense, the Vatican could be said to have weakened the consensus by joining it.

The Vatican was able, however, to leave the conference on a fairly positive note. It heaped praise on the document's sections regarding the family, empowerment of women, health care, migrants and sustained Third World development. These are serious issues, the Vatican delegation said, and the church plans to help follow through on them.

What still worries the Vatican was a prevalent attitude among population planners in Cairo. It was typified by a seemingly offhand remark toward the end of the conference by Norway's Nicolaas Biegman, vice president of the main editing committee. He told reporters that population planners had been willing to pledge respect for religious and cultural values this year, but wondered if this would be possible 10 years from now if the world were facing a population "emergency."

That kind of thinking is why the pope, when he travels to the United Nations in October, is expected to deliver a warning to the world community on the sacredness of life, the importance of marriage and the need for responsibility in sexual behavior.

Local viewpoints vary on attention given to Holy See

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Secular media coverage on the the Holy See's anti-abortion stance at the International Conference on Population and Development was seemingly more prevalent than all other aspects of the conference combined.

This development can have its good and bad points, according to people interviewed in the Rochester diocese.

"I'm sure that the Vatican representation was firm in its position. (But) it might have been overplayed (in the media)," said Dr. Marvin Mich, academic dean and associate professor of Christian ethics at St. Bernard's Institute, 1100 S. Goodman St. "Any kind of controversy gets visibility. What gets the headlines is where there's disagreement."

Alison T. Clarke, coordinator of the Rochester-based Politics of Food Program, noted that that the Vatican's denouncement of abortion clouded what was otherwise an extremely harmonious gathering in Cairo.

"It was an amazing thing to go into that conference with a 92-percent consensus and end with a 96-percent consensus, and obviously the Catholic Church had a lot to do with that consensus. I think that would have been more apparent if the media had not put their eggs in one basket (regarding abortion)," noted Clarke, whose Politics of Food task force works toward building sustainable food systems.

Kathy Dubel, who serves as justice-and-peace coordinator for Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier, agreed that the Holy See's overall efforts were not fully acknowledged by the media.

"You can look at it from different perspectives. I don't think the Vatican was just involved in discussions of abortion," Dubel commented. "What the

Vatican was trying to do was enlarge the discussion so that it wasn't only focused on abortion and population control as the solution to all the development needs of our world," said Dubel. "The Vatican was emphasizing the need for education and the empowerment of women and girls, and just the whole question of sustainable development for the world, which really gets into the question of overconsumption by the developed world."

On the other hand, Rochester pro-life activist Carol Crossed welcomed the controversy caused by the Holy See's outspokenness regarding abortion.

"The Vatican had every right to make a real big deal," commented Crossed, a board member of Feminists for Life of Western New York.

Crossed charged that other conference representatives were operating on a "huge hidden agenda" which would lead to the "reproductive rights that the United States is trying to export to other countries. We use 30 percent of the world's resources but we're telling people to have less children under the guise of some 'rights' language."

Dubel alluded to this perceived inconsistency as well, saying, "If we only promote population control as the solution, we've missed half the boat. To say all the problems will be solved if the Third World limits its population is a little naive. There's still a lot of work that has to be done."

Crossed targeted the United States as the international conference's "major player, because we have the most money. And how many of those countries really want to go against us? They want to be our friends. (But) the Vatican refused to say, 'Isn't America wonderful?'"

Julie Brosnan, a parishioner at St. Catherine of Siena Church in Mendon, said she supported the Vatican on its decrying of abortion but did not favor the Catholic Church's ongoing disapproval of contraceptive usage as a means of population control.

"I think abortion for any reason is wrong," she said. "But I feel that the Vatican will have to sometime in the future change its stand on contraception."

Brosnan, who has two adopted children, agreed with points raised in an open letter to Pope John Paul II prior to the population conference. The document, which ran as a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* on the conference's opening day Sept. 5, was written by administrators of "Catholics Speak Out," a group based in Hyattsville, Md. The letter asked the pope to call upon "world leaders and officials of the United Nations to embrace as a worldwide goal the provision of voluntary contraceptive family-planning services to every man and woman who wants them by the end of this decade."

Brosnan explained that in order to preserve the high value of family life, married couples should only plan to have as many children as they feel they can raise properly as Christians. "It's more important that they're taught the law of God. It's more important that I teach the children I have, rather than what is the number I have," she said.

Beyond the conference's controversial aspects, Mich was pleased that all parties involved were in general agreement on the "Program of Action's" final draft.

"It did seem to be resolved in a positive fashion," Mich said. He supported the delegates' consensus on the "self-reliance or self-determination of each nation, as well as justice for solving these issues."

"I felt like it was a major step forward, and I think some of that comes out of those other (United Nations population) conferences," Clarke said.

Clarke added that despite media coverage, "the Catholic Church was more open to dialogue than in the past," referring to final documents at similar conferences in 1974 and 1984 that were renounced by Vatican officials.