

WORLD & NATION

Vatican warns advances may result in racism

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican warned that globalization and technological advances are threatening to generate new forms of racism against society's weakest members, including immigrant populations, the poor and the unborn.

It called on governments to be vigilant against the creation of a "sub-category of human beings," which it said would represent a "new and terrible form of slavery."

The comments came in a new edition of the document, "The Church and Racism," by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. First published in 1988, it was revised ahead of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, scheduled for Aug. 31-Sept. 7 in Durban, South Africa.

The document includes the original 1988 text and a new 15-page introduction, prepared as a contribution to the U.N.-sponsored racism conference, to which the Vatican was sending a delegation. A copy was obtained by Catholic News Service.

The introduction clearly signaled the Vatican's determination to make migration, poverty and pro-life issues a key part of its agenda at the U.N. conference. It also called for a major educational effort against racism and intolerance and gave qualified support for affirmative action programs.

The document described a troubling array of discriminatory practices that have emerged in various parts of the world, including ethnic or nationalistic wars, "zero immigration" laws, new forms of exploitation against immigrants or children, and racist messages on the Internet.

It linked these developments to the rapidly accelerating globalization, which has brought economic opportunities to some populations but created cultural disintegration in others.

The document said rejection of foreign-



Martin Lueders/CNS

Immigrants become U.S. citizens at a July 4 naturalization service in Arlington, Va. In a revised edition of a 1988 letter on racism, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace warned that globalization and technology threaten to generate new forms of racism against immigrant populations, the poor and the unborn.

ers or those of other races often occurs when there is "fear of a loss of identity in a world becoming planetary too rapidly." Paradoxically, while the globe's peoples and cultures are intermingling more than ever, discrimination has not decreased and is perhaps worsening, it said.

Discussing new forms of discrimination, it said that since 1988 two "great global divides have grown deeper."

"The first is the ever more tragic phenomenon of poverty and social discrimination, and the other, more recent and less widely condemned, concerns the unborn child as the subject of experimentation and technological intervention," it said.

As examples, it cited the use of embryos in artificial procreation, the creation of what is known as "superfluous embryos," and the use of embryos in so-called thera-

peutic cloning.

"Here there is a risk of a new form of racism, for the development of these techniques could lead to the creation of a 'sub-category of human beings,' destined basically for the convenience of certain others. This would be a new and terrible form of slavery," it said.

It warned that the temptation of eugenics, the attempt to improve a race through control of hereditary factors, was potentially strong today, especially if exploited by powerful commercial interests.

The document said the Internet sometimes has become a conduit for racist and discriminatory messages, and it called on public authorities to protect the common good and "avoid letting serious prejudices enter society by means of communication."

Before the Durban conference, some

Arab countries drew the ire of Israel and the United States, saying they wanted participants to examine Zionism — which supports the state of Israel — as a form of racism. The Vatican document did not directly address that, but denounced anti-Semitism and said anti-Zionism sometimes serves as "a screen for anti-Semitism."

In an interview Aug. 28 with the Vatican agency Fides, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, the Holy See's permanent observer to U.N. offices in Geneva and head of the Vatican delegation to Durban, said no one equates Zionism with racism anymore. But he said the conference might try to address the question of Palestinian suffering in other ways.

The Vatican document indirectly touched upon another controversial topic of the racism conference, the question of financial compensation to descendants of slaves.

The document said that, from a legal point of view, all persons have a right to equitable reparation if personally and directly they have suffered material or moral injury. Ideally, reparation should erase all the consequences of the injustice. When that is not possible, some form of equivalent compensation should be made — but that, the document acknowledged, is often difficult to calculate.

The document said the principle of reparation also has implications in relations between nations, for example, the "obligation of giving substantial help to developing countries."

The Vatican expressed qualified support for affirmative action policies, which aim to advance the position of racial or ethnic groups that have been discriminated against in the past — for example, in creating special employment, education or financial opportunities.

The Vatican said that, in the end, such policies are legitimate as long as they are temporary and do not end up indefinitely maintaining different rights for different groups.

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