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STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY, ARCHBISHOP RENATO R. MARTINO

PERMANENT OBSERVER OF THE HOLY SEE TO THE UNITED NATIONS
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE HOLY SEE TO THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



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Mr President,

The Delegation of the Holy See wishes in the first place to express its particular appreciation to the President, the Government and the People of Egypt for the welcome that we have all received in this city of Cairo and for the excellent arrangements that have been made for the Conference.

Our meeting in these days represents the culmination of a period of intense reflection and activity on the part of the international community on a number of important challenges which all of us must face in the coming years. Pope John Paul II has stressed rightly that these challenges touch on crucial issues. They concern the future of humanity.

The period of preparation, which has lasted a number of years, has shown that population policy, if it is to respond to these challenges, cannot simply be about numbers. It must deal with the conditions in which all the people of the world are called to live. It is about the solidarity that must be fostered among peoples so that humanity can become more and more a true family.

The Holy See has taken an active and constructive part in the preparatory period, fully respecting the procedures of the Conference, entering into dialogue with the various participants at all levels, while remaining true to its own particular position and status in the international community.

1. This Conference deals not only with global statistics or the complex question of population-growth rates, which have in recent

years been noticeably decreasing. The very title "International Conference on Population and Development" shows that our task involves the search for a better management and a more equitable distribution of the goods of this earth, which in God's design were destined to be shared as the common heritage of all. *Population policy* must always be seen as part of a more comprehensive *development policy*. Both are, in fact, about the same reality, namely, the centrality of the human person and the responsibility of all to guarantee that every individual person can live in a manner which respects his or her dignity. The great biblical tradition describes the human person as being created as nothing less than "in the image of God". The purpose of this Conference should be to ensure that every person on this earth can live in conditions which truly reflect that dignity. While many development issues are treated in the various chapters of the Draft Final Document, the Holy See finds that the Chapter dealing explicitly with the relationship between population and development is disproportionately small with respect to the document as a whole.

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Population growth or decline affects the lives of people who strive to live in dignity and security, but who are thwarted by fragile political and socio-economic structures. Development strategies require equity in the distribution of resources and technology within the international community and access to international markets. The servicing of the external debt of the poorest nations strangles their social development. Measures are needed to make available, on priority terms, the technology required for improvements in agriculture, clean water supply, food security and distribution, and health care, especially to overcome those infectious diseases which greatly contribute to maternal and child mortality.

2. This Conference addresses in a special way the position of *women* within population and development policies. Already ten

years ago, at the Mexico City Population Conference, the Holy See delegation stressed that population policies must address as a priority the advancement of women's level of education and health care, especially primary health care. In both developed and developing countries, the Catholic Church has been and is deeply involved in providing a wide range of education and health care services, with special attention to women and children, especially the poor.

Throughout the world, also in countries with only a minority Catholic population, tens of thousands of hospitals, clinics, dispensaries, as well as other facilities for mother and child health and the care of the elderly, are run by the Catholic Church or funded by Catholic donors. Such health care facilities, along with Church structures for formal and informal education, contribute to the advancement of women in such a way as to foster their active participation in the development process and to remove the often excessive burdens which women in developing countries must bear. Much remains to be done in this area and the Holy See, as well as members of the Church in various parts of the world, remain ready to cooperate in achieving this goal.

3. Population policies have a particular place in development policies, as they involve at the same time *global* questions and the *most intimate* area of the lives of men and women: the responsible use of their sexuality and their mutual responsibility concerning human reproduction.

Responsible decisions concerning the number of children and the spacing of births belong to parents, who must be free from all coercion and pressure from public authorities, which should however ensure that citizens have accurate information on the various demographic factors involved. The Holy See, following on its longstanding and consistent position, welcomes the affirmations of



this Conference which stress that coercion be excluded from all aspects of population policy. It is to be hoped that these affirmations will be scrupulously put into practice by all the nations participating here and that nations and the international community will be vigilant in eliminating abuses associated with family planning programmes.

In the past, population policies were structured in such a way that they often tended towards coercion and pressure, especially through the setting of targets for providers. Women were the primary victims. Subtle forms of coercion and pressure have also resulted from a misrepresentation of demographic data which induces fear and anxiety about the future.

This Conference must mark the beginning of a new and deeper reflection on population policy. Respect for life and for the dignity of the human person must be the ultimate guiding norm for such a policy. This policy should foster the family based on marriage and must sustain parents, fathers and mothers, in their mutual and responsible decisions with regard to the procreation and education of children. The *Draft Final Document*, in fact, draws attention to the need to foster family stability, for the positive effects that such stability brings to society.

The Holy See does not support a notion of procreation at all costs. Its respect for the sacred significance of the transmission of human life makes it stress, even more than others, the *responsibility* which must characterize the decisions of parents as to whether, at a given moment, they should have or not have a child. This responsibility concerns not only their own personal fulfillment, but their responsibilities to God, to the new life that they will mutually bring into the world, to their existing children and their family, as well as to society, in a correct hierarchy of moral values.

Lack of responsibility in the area of human sexuality cannot but be a cause of concern to everybody. It is women and children who are most often the principal victims of such irresponsible behaviour. Much remains to be done to educate and form men to more responsible behaviour and to their own sharing in responsibilities concerning the procreation and the education of children. Lack of responsibility in sexual behaviour is also due to the fostering today of attitudes of sexual permissiveness, which focus above all on personal pleasure and gratification.

One of the great concerns of the Holy See about the Draft Final Document is that, while in identifying behaviour which the text itself considers "high-risk" or undesirable, all too often it limits itself primarily to suggestions as to how the "risks" can be reduced or contained, shying away from proposing a change in such behaviour at its roots. No one can deny that society must be aware of the health consequences of irresponsible or immature behaviour, but one has to ask what will be the long term consequences of the abdication by society of its responsibility to challenge and to attempt to change such undesirable behavioural patterns? Even more so, what happens when society tacitly accepts such irresponsible behaviour as normal?

The Church's position on responsible parenthood is well known, although at times it is misunderstood. Some here might consider it too demanding for today's man and woman. But no way of fostering the deepest respect for human life and the processes of its transmission is going to be an easy one. Responsibility brings burdens. Responsibility demands discipline and self-restraint.

4. Human life is so important that its transmission has been entrusted not simply to a series of mechanical biological processes. New life, from its very beginnings, has the right to be

generously welcomed into the loving and stable communion of the family, the natural and fundamental group unit of society. The family belongs to the heritage of humanity, precisely because it is the place where the stable relationship of a man and a woman is transformed into a caring institution for the responsible transmission and nurturing of new life.

The problems which families have to face are well known. It is commonplace, likewise, to attribute many of the problems concerning social disintegration to a breakdown in family structures. Few however have the courage to develop creative programmes to strengthen the family and to concretely assist parents in the exercise of their rights and in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Society must give primary recognition to the extraordinary contribution which parents render to society's own good, and translate that recognition into effective support on the level of cultural, fiscal and social policy. The Holy See strongly rejects any attempts to weaken the family or to propose a radical redefining of its structure, such as assigning the status of family to other life-style forms.

5. The transmission of life begins with the intimate relationship of parents and is entrusted to parental love. The responsible transmission of life and the loving care of parents belong together. The Holy See cannot endorse methods of family planning which fundamentally separate those two essential dimensions of human sexuality, and will express its position on such methods through an appropriate reservation. The Holy See is also concerned - and must express this concern - about some specific family planning methods, which while not explicitly treated in the Conference texts, are obviously included under the general term "family planning services". This concern touches especially programmes of sterilization, a family planning method which is generally irreversible, and thus excludes a change in decisions



about child bearing, and is the family planning method most open to abuse on human rights grounds, especially when promoted among the poor or the illiterate.

The natural methods of family planning receive only passing mention in the Draft Plan of Action, despite the fact that a substantial number of families wish to use these methods, not only for moral reasons, but also because they are scientifically effective, inexpensive, without the side effects often associated with hormonal and technical methods, and because they foster, in a unique manner, the cooperation and mutual respect of both partners, especially through requiring a more responsible attitude on the part of men.

6. The Holy See is particularly concerned about the manner in which the question of abortion has been treated in the preparation of this Conference.

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International consensus language urges governments to "take appropriate steps to help women to avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning, and whenever possible, to provide for the humane treatment and counselling of women who have had recourse to abortion". The Holy See is hopeful that the Conference will reaffirm this principle.

While there are many texts in the document which would clearly infer a desire of nations to reduce the number of abortions and to remove the conditions which lead women to have recourse to abortions, there have been efforts by some to foster the concept of "a right to abortion" and to establish abortion as an essential component of population policy. Texts under negotiation ask that countries reexamine their legislation on abortion and countries are urged, in similar texts, to provide in the coming years, services of "pregnancy termination" for persons "of all ages". Should

current bracketed texts be approved, they would endorse "pregnancy termination", without setting any limits, any criteria or any restrictions on such practices, as integral parts of reproductive health services. Through the possible approval of other bracketed language, addressed to the entire international community, such unrestricted access to abortion might be elevated to the level of a right.

None of these new tendencies emerged during the regional preparatory Conferences. The concept of a "right to abortion" would be entirely innovative in the international community and would be contrary to the constitutional and legislative positions of many states, as well as being alien to the sensitivities of vast numbers of persons, believers and unbelievers alike.

7. The Holy See supports efforts which may emerge from this Conference to provide for the reduction of maternal and infant mortality and to ensure improvements in the conditions of women's health and child survival. These are important in themselves. The dignity of individual people is at stake. The existence of high levels of maternal and infant mortality in any part of the world is a wound in the image of a modern world which prides itself on its high level of material, scientific and technical progress.

At the same time, there is need to strengthen counselling services to support women faced with difficulties regarding their pregnancies and to provide humane treatment following the negative consequences of induced abortions.

On many occasions in the preparatory work of this Conference, the Holy See has stressed that it will support, and contribute to the putting into practice of, a concept of "reproductive health" which is understood as a holistic vision of health concerns in the area of reproduction, that is, a vision which embraces men and women in the entirety of their personality, mind and body, and

which is oriented towards a mature and responsible exercise of their sexuality.

While such a concept must look to the good of each and every individual, it cannot overlook the fact that human sexuality is of its very nature *interpersonal*. Reproductive health must take into account the formation of people in those areas which will lead them to be responsible and respectful in their behaviour. The current text is largely individualistic in its reflection and as such tends to be lacking in its appreciation of the very nature of human sexuality.

8. In today's world, in which many problems exist concerning irresponsible behaviour in the area of sexuality, and in which women in particular are exploited, the education of adolescents towards mature and responsible sexual behaviour is essential. The principal responsibility in this area belongs to parents, whose rights are recognized in numerous international instruments. All efforts must be made to guarantee parents the full exercise of these rights and to assist them to carry out their responsibilities and duties. The task of rearing children belongs in the first place to parents, not to the State. The Holy See hopes that texts under negotiation will clearly endorse the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents in this area, will draw attention to the negative aspects of premature sexual activity for young people and will endeavour to foster mature behaviour on the part of adolescents.

Mr President,

At the beginning of my intervention, I noted that the Holy See had followed the preparatory period for this Cairo Conference with great attention and in respectful dialogue with all the participants. I can assure you, that when the good of the people of this world is at stake, the Holy See and the institutions of the



Catholic Church throughout the world will continue, in collaboration with the nations of the international community, to make their specific contribution, and indeed to intensify their traditional concrete service of basic education and care, in complete respect for human life and for the development of peoples in solidarity.

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