

# Abortion stance softened for Cairo

Muslims, Vatican influenced U.S.

By Jim Anderson  
DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR

U.S. policy on abortion, in the statement to be issued at the U.N. Conference on Population and Development, has softened in the face of opposition from Islamic countries and the Vatican.

"We are not pushing an international right to abortion," a senior Clinton administration official said yesterday, adding that any language in the draft final statement produced in April would be altered once the Cairo conference begins next week.

About 90 percent of the preliminary document was settled by the 160 countries attending the preliminary conference. The remaining 10 percent of the language, enclosed in brackets to show a lack of agreement, is the most explosive, dealing with contraception, abortion, and teen-agers' access to information on sexual matters.

Earlier, the U.S. policy was stated by State Department Undersecretary for Global Affairs Timothy Wirth to be that abortions should be "safe, legal and rare," suggesting that the right should be universal although not encouraged.

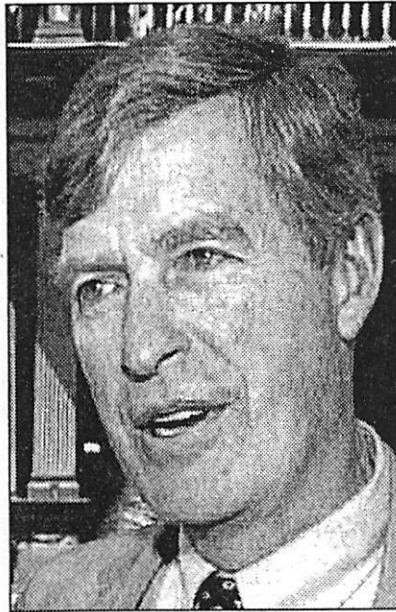
Some Islamic newspaper reports have accused the United States of pushing a "strategy of genocide" by insisting that abortions should be acceptable when necessary. They argued that the U.S. policy was aimed at the developing world, where the birthrates are highest.

The issue has become so explosive that Saudi Arabia and Sudan, both strict Muslim countries, announced in recent days they would not attend the conference. Muslim fundamentalists in Egypt have threatened to disrupt the meetings with violence.

Some Arab reports have accused the United States of pushing its policy by threatening to withhold U.S. development aid funds to those countries that don't go along with U.S. policies on population control.

The State Department quoted Vice President Al Gore, who said last week those claims are "unambiguously and absolutely wrong."

But the senior administration



Tim Wirth's State Department spin on abortion as "safe, legal and rare" was radical in some nations.

official, speaking to reporters yesterday on the basis that he not be named, conceded that "unfortunate language" in a cable sent out by the State Department in March may have given the impression that future financial aid would be linked to support for U.S. population policies.

On the decisions by Saudi Arabia and Sudan to boycott the conference, the official said: "The politics of population right now are very volatile. I don't think Saudi Arabia's decision not to attend the conference will affect many other nations."

The State Department said in a separate statement, "We are certain that it will be a productive and useful conference."

But the informal coalition between the Vatican and Islamic fundamentalists appears to have caught the U.S. administration by surprise.

U.S. officials were certain a month ago that the issue of contraception and abortion could be pushed through, if necessary, by a formal vote, since the Vatican at that time was supported by only four other small countries.

Now even moderate Arabic nations are backing away from any suggestion that they should permit abortions.

An Egyptian assistant foreign minister, Muhammad Adil Safti, noted that the draft document to be discussed in Cairo says that "abortions must not be encouraged in any way as a family planning method."

He noted that abortion is banned by law in Egypt and "whoever has an abortion in this country is considered a lawbreaker."

He interpreted the draft document, produced by preliminary conference in New York, as saying "a woman who has violated the law and committed an act that is punishable by the law should, nevertheless, receive medical and health care."

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