

# Parley leaders try to steer emphasis off abortion issue

By Kate Dourian  
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CAIRO — The U.N. population conference deferred action on the abortion issue yesterday after the Vatican reiterated the hard-line Catholic stance blocking the latest compromise.

Archbishop Renato Martino, the Holy See's envoy to the United Nations, dismissed any hopes that the Vatican would water down its objections to a proposed draft on abortion and heed a U.S. plea not to hold up agreement.

"The church's position on responsible parenthood is well known, even though at times it is misunderstood. Some here might consider it too demanding for today's man and woman," Archbishop Martino told the conference.

"But no way of fostering the deepest respect for human life and the process of its transmission is going to be an easy one. Responsibility brings burdens. Responsibility demands discipline and self-restraint," he said to loud applause in the auditorium.

The Vatican is facing a virtual revolt by liberal nations anxious to get on with drafting a global program for slowing population growth over the next 20 years.

The United States, Britain and Egypt urged the Vatican to state its reservations to the draft rather than block agreement.

"Let's hope today either they state what their problems are and take reservations or join the consensus," Timothy Wirth, head of the U.S. delegation to the U.N. International Conference on Population and Development, told reporters.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who faces accusations by Muslim fundamentalists that the forum is a ploy by the West to impose its own morals on the Muslim world, said:

"If they are asking us to be flexible on an issue such as abortion, we have to explain our reasons for not accepting it. If no consensus is reached on this particular issue, we can simply voice our reservations."

The advice was repeated by Britain's minister for overseas development, Baroness Lynda Chalker, who said most delegates were convinced the Vatican would in any case dissent from any section on abortion.

"I believe they will. Most people think they will. If they want to enter reservations and don't want to wreck the conference, they should enter their reservation now," she said.

The Vatican, backed by other states whose populations are mostly Catholic, has held up agreement on the abortion section of a draft declaration that took three years to prepare.



Hosni Mubarak of Egypt suggested voicing "reservations."

Many delegates say abortion has distracted them from other issues and note that consensus has been achieved on all but 10 percent of the document being redrafted.

Egyptian Population Minister Maher Mahran, in an outburst at a news conference, said the Vatican should bow to the will of states representing more than 5 billion people.

"Does the Vatican rule the world? If the Vatican rules the world, if the world is one country and the Vatican is the boss, then fair enough. But we are equal partners," he said.

Delegates from some 175 countries came close to consensus on the abortion section in the draft after a marathon session Tuesday at which the Vatican delegate was accused of delaying tactics.

The drafting committee moved on to the less contentious chapter on migration and left the abortion section to a small working group. The draft will be presented to the main committee tomorrow and may be adopted without further debate.

"The final version will pass if the majority adopt it," said Hungarian delegate Klinger Andras.

The latest text released explicitly rejects abortion as a means of family planning, urges countries to tackle the threat to women from unsafe abortions and reduce their recourse to abortion by better family planning.

At a forum of nongovernmental organizations yesterday, religious leaders faced a rowdy gathering and Egyptian men challenged the credentials of the woman academic representing Islam.

The Muslim professor of Islamic studies provoked the greatest reaction among the mainly Egyptian audience when she urged women of her faith to interpret their religion and not depend on men to do it for them.