

WORLD

Population conference reaches tentative accord

Strategy covers next 20 years

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REUTERS NEWS AGENCY

CAIRO — After a series of rapid deals on sensitive language, a U.N. conference approved in committee yesterday a program enshrining the new concept of reproductive rights and setting a population strategy for the next 20 years.

In hours of frantic bargaining, delegates found new language acceptable, often with reservations, to the four main blocs of U.N. members — Muslim states, developing countries, rich Western states, and the Vatican and its Catholic allies.

The thrust of the program is to hold down world population growth by making family planning available worldwide and by giving

women the power to make decisions on their own lives.

The program says people have the right to decide freely and responsibly the number of children they have and when they have them. They also have the right to sexual and reproductive health, defined as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being" in all matters relating to reproduction.

The program is not binding; many countries say they will interpret it in their own way and a handful of mainly Muslim countries boycotted the conference from the start. It is to go before the plenary session today.

If the program succeeds, the United Nations says, the world population will rise to 7.27 billion in 2015, up from 5.67 billion today. If it fails, the world could have up to 7.92 billion people in 2015 and 12.5 billion in 2050.

The main drafting committee, after lengthy delays in the morning, eventually passed the whole

text of the final declaration, including the highly controversial chapter on "reproductive rights and reproductive health."

"Other unions," as in "marriages and other unions," disappeared from the text when Western liberals decided that the concept survived through a reference to various forms of family.

Nicolaas Biegman, vice chairman of the main committee, told a news conference "other unions" had led to too many misunderstandings. Some Muslim states thought it covertly tried to endorse homosexual "marriages."

In the debate on "reproductive rights," eight to 10 delegations, including the Vatican and some Muslim states, said they were not completely happy, observers said.

But at this late stage, the eighth day of the nine-day U.N. population conference, they will have little opportunity to reopen debate on the language. The most they can do is take a reservation in today's plenary session.

A working group on reproductive health and rights had made minor last-minute changes to placate the Vatican, but the Vatican delegation said it would give its final verdict today.

"Some time will be required to examine in greater detail the full implications of the complete chapter, while it is transmitted . . . to the plenary," Vatican delegate Monsignor Diarmuid Martin told the committee.

Nothing the Vatican has negotiated should be seen to endorse abortion, he added.

Muslim states including Syria, Jordan and Libya all told the committee they were unhappy with the way the final text grants reproductive rights to individuals rather than only couples.

But Egypt, which had previously campaigned against the word "individuals," said it had no reservations.

"We have joined the consensus," said Egyptian delegate Mervat Talawi.

Egypt releases TV producer

CAIRO (Reuters) — Egyptian police yesterday released a freelance television producer who had helped arrange for CNN to film the circumcision of an Egyptian girl, police said.

Gayle Young, CNN's Cairo bureau chief, said police detained female producer Nevine Hamdan, an Egyptian, on Sunday without definite charges.

CNN last week broadcast a film showing a 10-year-old girl being circumcised while her wrists were tied to her ankles and with her family watching the process.

Police said Ms. Hamdan was released yesterday, but the prosecutor ordered the detention for 45 days of two members of the circumcised girl's family, the man who performed the circum-

cision and another man who helped him.

It is illegal for doctors in Egypt to perform female circumcisions, and any doctor caught doing so risks expulsion from the medical syndicate. Most circumcisions are performed by circumcisers with little or no medical training.

The CNN Cairo bureau said the prosecutor informed it about Ms. Hamdan's release but she still had not contacted the bureau.

Ms. Young said Ms. Hamdan helped CNN find the family and arrange a convenient time to film the operation. She said CNN paid Ms. Hamdan for her work but did not pay the girl's family or the circumciser.