

# Population envoys offer compromises

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• The Washington Post

CAIRO, Egypt — Delegates were working out new wording yesterday to assuage Vatican and Islamic fears that a U.N. population conference will enshrine abortion as an international right or as a means of family planning.

In preparation for today's opening sessions, U.S. and European delegates were offering compromises on controversial definitions of "reproductive rights" and the family; sex education and family-planning services for teen-agers; and abortion.

These issues, while constituting less than 10 percent of the U.N. draft, have emerged as the major stumbling block to consensus at the U.N. Conference on Population and Development. Its goal is to forge a strategy to stabilize human numbers at a level considered by experts to be environmentally sustainable.

"The outstanding questions are important, but they should not be allowed to overshadow the great progress we have made," said Nafis Sadik, executive director of the U.N. Population Fund and secretary general of the conference.

Even before today's opening addresses by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Vice President Al Gore and other dignitaries, U.N. officials were hailing the conference as a success. So far, 174 member countries and six non-members have sent delegations to the meeting, with only six — Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Sudan, Monaco, Lichtenstein and Iraq — staying away.

Security for the meeting was extremely tight. Islamic militants have threatened to attack foreigners attending what they have termed the "licentious conference."

In private meetings this weekend, U.S. officials urged non-aligned na-

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## Envoys seek compromise

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tions to accept compromise language drafted over the summer by the European Union, participants said.

U.S. officials expressed optimism yesterday that the proposal would emerge as the vehicle for breaking the logjam over the draft because it enjoys support from many countries, ranging from socially conservative Ireland to the liberal Scandinavian nations.

Meanwhile, advocates of the compromise acknowledged they still must overcome stiff resistance from the Vatican and Islamic countries, whose governments are under pressure from religious authorities who have criticized the document as condoning homosexuality and extramarital sex, among other things.

Also, one of the most controversial passages, on reproductive health, has been attacked by conservative Catholics and Muslims as advocating a universal right to abortion. The compromise states at the outset of that section that policy on reproductive matters "is the sovereign right of each nation, consistent with the national laws and in conformity with international human-rights standards."

### Warning to White House

A leading U.S. bishop warned yesterday that unless the Clinton administration abandons its ardent support of abortion rights, there will be "a powerful incentive to American Catholics to walk away from the Democratic Party as well as the Clinton administration."

"This administration has taken the most forthright stand on behalf of abortion on demand . . . of any political administration in the United States," said Bishop James McHugh, who heads the Camden, N.J., diocese and also is a Vatican

representative to the conference.

"I think that Catholics are tiring of it," McHugh said.

McHugh's comments, on NBC's "Meet the Press," drew a muted response from Gore.

"I don't agree with his characterization" of Clinton as the most vociferous abortion-rights president, Gore said. "I respect his (McHugh's) right to say that. I respect him as an individual, and I respect his beliefs, but we differ on issues" such as contraception and abortion rights.

Pope John Paul II, meanwhile, capping one of the most heated campaigns of his 16-year leadership, blasted the gathering anew with an attack on the "dangerous shortcut" of reducing birth rates by any means. The Vatican insists population problems can be alleviated by better distribution of global resources.

The pope spoke in a televised speech from his summer palace in Castel Gandolfo, Italy.

Information for this story was also gathered by The Associated Press.