

U.N. official links food to population control

By Philip Pulella
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ROME — A leading U.N. official yesterday contested Pope John Paul II's view that hunger is not linked to overpopulation, saying the world's future food needs will be inextricably linked to population control.

"Action on population policy in the next decade will determine our demographic future, and with it future food needs," Nafis Sadik, executive director of the U.N. Population Fund, said at the U.N.-sponsored World Food Summit.

Mrs. Sadik, who had heated clashes with the Vatican over the U.N. population conference in Cairo in 1994, spoke a day after the pope, who opened the summit, flatly rejected population control as the answer to food shortages.

Mrs. Sadik said world population is 5.9 billion and rising by 86 million a year.

Population in the middle of the next century could be as low as 8 billion or as high as 12 billion, a difference equal to the world population in 1975, she said.

The pope told the summit that demographics alone cannot explain inadequate distribution of food resources and rejected as "sophistry" a view that "when there are many, one is condemned to be poor."

"It would be illusory to believe that an arbitrary stabilization of the world population, or even its reduction, could solve the problem of hunger directly," he said.

Mrs. Sadik, a Pakistani who had a stormy meeting with the pope before the 1994 population conference, which she organized, told the food summit that empowering women to make choices would help slow population growth.

"In most countries with high rates of population growth, women would like to have fewer children than their parents' generation. If women could choose, families would be smaller and population growth slower," she said.

Mrs. Sadik said women in poor countries need the information and the means to time pregnancies.

"Ensuring the ability of women and men to exercise their repro-



Led by Mayor Francesco Rutelli, Romans parade by the Colosseum last night to show their support for the United Nations' World Food Summit.

ductive rights will have a decisive impact on population growth and on prospects for food security in the 21st century," she said.

The issue of "reproductive rights" was a minefield at the Cairo conference because the Vatican felt the phrase was a backdoor way of supporting abortion as a means of controlling population.

Mrs. Sadik, who did not refer to the pope's address in her speech,

said governments have to make reproductive rights and reproductive health "priorities in national and international development programs."

At the Cairo conference, the Vatican accused some developing countries and international development agencies of making aid conditional on the acceptance of birth-control programs to stem population growth.

WORLD

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★ FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1996 / PAGE A17