

Vatican criticizes Gore for abortion comments

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◦ New York Times News Service

ROME — Six days before the U. N. population conference in Cairo, the Vatican made unusual, personal comments yesterday about Vice President Al Gore, accusing him of misrepresenting the gathering's intentions on abortion.

The accusations were a setback for the Clinton administration's effort to lower the level of discord with the Vatican over the conference. They also signaled the Vatican's continued readiness to confront the administration over central moral issues.

Since preparations for the conference began in April, Pope John Paul II and his aides have taken the lead in condemning it as likely to legitimize abortion as a means of birth control, in contradiction of Roman Catholic doctrine.

Yesterday's statement by Joaquin Navarro-Valls, the pope's chief spokesman, was the first time the Vatican had formally singled out the United States as the principal sponsor of pro-abortion policies and also the first time it had publicly criticized a high American official by name.

"Mr. Al Gore, vice president of the U.S.A. and member of the American delegation, recently stated that 'the United States has not sought, does not seek and will not seek to establish an international



Al Gore

Vatican says his statement was misleading

right to abortion,'" Navarro-Valls said at a press conference. "The draft population document, which has the United States as its principal sponsor, contradicts, in reality, Mr. Gore's statement."

Gore made the remark quoted by the Vatican at the National Press Club in Washington this week. Yesterday, a spokesman for the vice president declined to comment on the Vatican criticism except to say that Gore's comment reflected U. S. policy, not what was in the draft of the population conference document.

To substantiate his assertion, Navarro-Valls quoted from passages in the conference document referring, for instance, to "the right to have access to methods of fertility regulation which are safe, efficacious, accessible and acceptable." He said the World Health Organization had defined "fertility regulation" as including abortion.

While the Vatican has denied striking a formal alliance with Is-

lamic countries, it has won significant backing from Islamic scholars who, like some Roman Catholic figures, argue that the effect of the document promotes adolescent promiscuity, abortion and homosexuality.

Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Lebanon have announced they will not attend the 170-nation conference in Cairo, where Egyptian Islamic fundamentalists threatened last week to attack participants in what they term the "conference of licentiousness."

Beyond the arguments over abortion, the Vatican is also fundamentally opposed to the idea that population growth in itself is necessarily a hindrance to development.

According to the U.N. Population Fund, the world's population is set to increase from its current 5.6 billion to 8.5 billion in the year 2025. The Cairo conference is supposed to approve measures to stabilize the world's population at 7.27 billion by the year 2050.

"Population policies are only a part of development policy," Navarro-Valls said. "In fact they include a whole range of areas: nutrition, medicine, agriculture, education, demographics, economics and politics, together with more profound moral and spiritual dimensions. True development will not be respected if only demographic data is considered as the obstacle to development."