



## **94-09-08: Statement of Religious Consult. on Population, Repro...**

\*\*\*\*\*

The electronic preparation of this document has been done by the  
 Population Information Network(POPIN) of the United Nations Population  
 Division in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme

\*\*\*\*\*

AS WRITTEN

TESTIMONY OF PROFESSOR DANIEL C. MAGUIRE

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

MILWAUKEE WISCONSIN, U.S.A.

(FAX 414 961 2150)

PRESIDENT OF THE RELIGIOUS CONSULTATION ON  
 POPULATION, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND ETHICS.

SEPTEMBER 8, 1994

First, a word of introduction. I am a Catholic theologian,  
 trained at a Roman university accredited by the Vatican. In me  
 you will hear the voice of those Catholics whose views have not  
 been presented by the Vatican at this Conference.

Just as history is more apt to record wars than the achievements  
 of peace, so news reports on this Conference have neglected its  
 stunning positive results. For the first time in history, the

nations of the world have sat down, with women as well represented as men, with the rich and the poor at the same table, and with military power playing no role at all in this hall, and addressed their moral obligations to all of humankind and to this generous host of an earth.

The great effort that led up to this moment has not been sterile. A remarkably broad consensus has been reached on at least six points: (1) Population problems will not be solved until women are educated and empowered. (2) Parents must have hope that their children will live. (3) Development must be geared to the elimination of poverty and not left to vacuous and self-serving "trickle down" economics. (4) The richer nations must civilize their rapacious consumption patterns. (5) We must control our power to destroy the earth which for the first time is greater than the earth's power to heal itself. (6) Contraception and safe abortion should be available to those who need them. With all the dissension on this last point, a vote would reveal a strong majority on this also.

Underlying all of these six points is the insight that HOPE IS THE BEST CONTRACEPTIVE.

Although the draft does not even mention religion, the first five points are deeply indebted to the justice theories that define holiness for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and are highly compatible with other major world religions. At its roots, the document is thoroughly religious.

Sadly, due to the Vatican's idiosyncratic fixation on the sixth

point-contraception and abortion--the moral triumph of the document has been overshadowed, and religions have once again been made to look like obstructive icebergs in the shipping lanes of progress. As the International Institute for Sustainable Development put it, the Vatican's "high-profile lobbying and systematic opposition" forced a "disproportionate amount of attention to these issues" and prevented development of other serious issues. By taking rigid positions on DEBATEABLE questions, on which good people may respectfully disagree, the Vatican has departed from the Catholic tradition of tolerance (called Probabilism) and insulted the other world religions that disagree with them on contraception and on abortion.

At an NGO discussion yesterday The Religious Consultation on Population, Reproductive health and Ethics presented views by Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic experts. All these experts disagreed with the Vatican's unhelpful position on contraception as always being evil and most disagreed with them on abortion. No one supported the Vatican's position on unsafe abortions--i.e., that the only moral way to avoid them is abstinence--since it seems to imply that women who die from unsafe abortions deserve to do so.

Quite simply and quite sadly, I believe that the Vatican has squandered its moral authority on issues where it has no privileged expertise.

The Plan of Action calls for nothing less than major cultural revolutions. It calls for men to share power with women, for rich nations to build up the poor, and for developers to put nature before some of their profit. Without help from the

religions of the world, those necessary moral revolutions will not take place. It has been said that people will die for a dogma who will not stir for a conclusion.

Our Consultation is working to discover the renewable moral energy of the world's religions. We invite all world religions to dig into their rich store and work together for the salvation of a world in terminal peril.

---

For further information, please contact: [popin@undp.org](mailto:popin@undp.org)  
POPIN Gopher site: <gopher://gopher.undp.org/11/ungophers/popin>  
POPIN WWW site: <http://www.undp.org/popin>