



AS WRITTEN

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION
OF THE HOLY SEE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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**Statement of the Holy See
at the Concluding Session of the
21st Special Session of the General Assembly
for the Overall Review and Appraisal of the
Implementation of the Programme of Action of the
International Conference on Population and Development
New York, 2 July 1999**

Mr. President,

The Holy See welcomes the progress that has been made in these past few months in the preparatory process for the General Assembly Special Session devoted to the overall review and appraisal of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. However, my Delegation finds that some of its expectations have not been met. I am sure that many delegations share similar sentiments.

The Delegation of the Holy See has worked, in a constructive way and in a spirit of good will. My Delegation has not failed to point out some serious concerns regarding this review process, during the preparatory part of the Special Session as well as during the Session itself.

From the outset, my Delegation has constantly reiterated its compliance with the guidelines set in General Assembly Resolution 53/1 83, specifically that "the special session will be undertaken on the basis of and with full respect for the Programme of Action and that there will be no renegotiation of the existing agreements contained therein". As such, it has not escaped the attention of this Delegation that many other delegations have not followed these guidelines. This blatant disregard of the General Assembly Resolution has not only tainted the entire review process, but it has set a dangerous precedent for the work of the United Nations.

As you well know, the Holy See was able to join, with serious reservations, in the consensus to the Programme of Action adopted at the Cairo conference. The Holy See continues to hold these reservations.

Despite the positive aspects of the text presented entitled *Key actions for the further Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development*, the text has many broader implications. The text departs from the carefully negotiated language of the Programme of Action which balances the needs of adolescents' to privacy and confidentiality with the parental rights, duties, and responsibilities enshrined in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It contains references which could be seen as accepting

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extramarital sexual activity, especially among adolescents. Also, it would seem to assert that abortion services are a dimension of population policy and, indeed of primary health care as a method of choice. Together with so many people around the world, the Holy See affirms that human life begins at the moment of conception and that life must be defended and protected. The Holy See can never condone abortion or policies which favour abortion.

Nothing that the Holy See has done in this process should be understood or interpreted as an endorsement of concepts it cannot support for moral reasons. Especially, nothing is to be understood to imply that the Holy See endorses abortion or has in any way changed its moral position concerning abortion or contraceptives or sterilization.

The intention therefore of the Holy See is to welcome this consensus decision of the Special Session, and accordingly, offer its statement of interpretation. I would ask that the text of this statement that includes the official position of the Holy See, as follows, be included in the report of the **Twenty-First Special Session of the General Assembly**.

**Official Position of the Holy See on the
Key Actions for the Further Implementation of the
Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development
2 July 1999**

The Holy See, in conformity with its nature and its particular mission, by welcoming the adoption of the final document of the special session of the General Assembly for the overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, wishes to express its understanding of the document entitled *Key Actions for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development*.

1. Regarding the terms “sexual health”, “reproductive health” and “sexual and reproductive health”, the Holy See considers these terms as applying to a holistic concept of health, which embraces the person in the entirety of his or her personality, mind and body, and which fosters the achievement of personal maturity in sexuality and in the mutual love and decision-making that characterize the conjugal relationship in accordance with moral norms. The **Holy** See does not consider abortion or access to abortion as a dimension of these terms.

2. With reference to the terms “contraception”, “family planning”, “reproductive rights”, and “female-controlled methods”, “the widest possible range of family-planning services”, “new options”, and “underutilized methods” and any other term regarding family-planning services and regulation of fertility, the Holy See’s welcoming the consensus decision should in no way be interpreted as constituting a change in its well-known position concerning those family-planning methods which the Catholic Church considers morally unacceptable or on family-planning services which do not respect the liberty of the spouses, human dignity and the human rights of those concerned.

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3. With reference to all international agreements, in particular on any existing agreements mentioned in this document, the Holy See reserves its position in this regard, consistent with the Holy See's acceptance or non-acceptance of them.

4. With reference to the term "couples and individuals", the Holy See understands that this term is to mean married couples and the individual man and woman who constitute the couple. The document, especially in its use of this term, remains marked by an individualistic understanding of sexuality which does not give due attention to the mutual love and decision-making that characterizes the conjugal relationship.

5. The Holy See interprets references to "family" or "families" in light of Principle 9 of the Programme of Action, that is, in terms of the duty to strengthen the family, the basic unit of society, and in terms of marriage as an equal partnership between man and woman, that is, husband and wife.

6. With regard to the term "gender", the Holy See reserves its position with the understanding that this is grounded in biological sexual identity, that is the two sexes, male and female.

7. The Holy See **reaffirms** that the education of "young people", including "children", "adolescents", "young men", and "young women", including education on sexual and reproductive health, is primarily and fundamentally the right, duty, and responsibility of parents, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26, paragraph 3: "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."

8. With regard to the access of "young people", including "adolescents", "young men", and "young women", to family planning services and reproductive health services, the Holy See considers that this is to mean married couples and the individual man and woman who constitute the couple. In this the Holy See wishes to give emphasis to the particular aspect of mutual love and decision making that characterize the marital relationship.

9. Specifically as regards paragraph &a) the Holy See interprets "the rights of adolescents to privacy, confidentiality and informed consent" in the context of issues surrounding, *infer alia*, sexual abuse, violence, or incest. In order for parents to assume their rights, duties and responsibilities to guide their children, their prior human rights in the choice of the education for their children must not be abrogated and every effort must be taken by governments and civil society to assist parents in fulfilling this essential role. In this regard the Holy See further interprets "respecting their cultural values and religious beliefs" to refer to the cultural values and religious beliefs of their parents, that is, until the adolescent attains the age of majority. The Holy See requests that this interpretation be noted in paragraph 52(a). ^{73 + Jee}

10. With respect to paragraph -), the Holy See affirms that human life begins at the moment of conception and that life must be defended and protected. The Holy See can never condone abortion or policies which favour abortion. The Holy See further affirms that the right of conscience of health-service providers is assured by, *infer alia*, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Holy See requests that this interpretation be noted in paragraph 45(bis). ^{63 + Jee}

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The Holy See requests that this statement of interpretation be reflected *verbatim* in the final report of the 21st Special Session of the General Assembly.



+ Renato R. Martino

Archbishop Renato R. Martino
Head of the Delegation of the Holy See to the
21st Special Session of the General Assembly
of the United Nations