NEGATIVE POPULATION GROWTH

THE NPG FORUM

The Cairo Conference:
Feminists vs. the Pope

by Lindsey Grant

The UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) is scheduled for September 5-13 in Cairo. It will try to agree on a "Programme of Action" to guide UN and (theoretically) national and local population activities for the next 20 years. A draft of the Programme now exists, and it appears that efforts to stop world population growth will be seriously diluted as groups with different objectives press their agendas.

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Donnybrook in New York

The final preparatory conference for the Cairo meeting ("PrepCom III") was held in New York City in April. A *New York Times* headline characterized the lineup as "Vatican Fights Plan to Bolster Role of Women", and that pretty well summarizes what happened at the conference.[1] Many delegations (including the U.S.) sought a sweeping declaration of the rights and needs of women, coupling it only very loosely to the issue of world population growth. The Vatican, mobilizing a few responsive governments, fought back in an unusually blunt effort to weaken the language concerning women's rights and to delete references to family planning, "reproductive health" and, above all, abortion. It succeeded only in getting such references "bracketed" (marked for final decision in the September conference.)

In the process, very little was heard about the population issue.

The population community has learned not to expect help from the Vatican. On the other hand, there is reason to believe that improvements in the status of women will help to bring human fertility down. To some considerable degree, the interests of the population community should parallel those of the feminists.

Things are, however, seldom what they seem, and a close reading of the draft Programme raises two fundamental issues:

First, the militant feminists' position rests on the unproven and dubious propositions (a) that, given unimpeded freedom of choice, the women of the world will choose the socially desirable fertility level, and (b) therefore that money spent on women's advancement is the most effective way to pursue population goals.

Second, having made (but not tried to prove) those assumptions, the militant feminists would divert some of what little money there is for direct population programs into feminist causes, some of which may be a long time coming. This is not a distant threat, it is proposed in the Programme and occurs in the U.S. AID program.

Most modern Americans endorse the principle of women's equality and the importance of assuring that they are not discriminated against, but that does not necessarily translate into support for the document that has come out of PrepCom III. The Department of State has been going along with the extreme feminists' agenda; it would do well to back off and look where it is being taken.

Crisis Denied

No Crisis? The more severe the population crisis is in the third world, the more justification there is for effective measures to bring fertility down, rather than simply stating that women (and couples) have the unqualified "right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children..." (draft Cairo Programme, Chap.II, Principle 7).

Ergo, there must be no crisis.

Several U.S. NGOs (non-governmental organizations) held a series of town meetings preparatory to the Cairo Conference. One organizer, in a statement that comes across as a remarkable combination of arrogance and error, wrote: "... the opinions expressed largely echoed the crisis formulation heard two decades ago, rather than the tempered position developed over the past 20 years by U.N. and U.S. officials... Instead of measured language about population change, many people attending the town meetings stridently evoke 'the population problem.'"[2]

Wait a minute. The "tempered position" is brand new, not a 20 year development; it is the product of a small and determined group of militant feminists, worldwide, rather than a response to third world pressures. The local speakers were right. There is not only a "problem"; there is a crisis.

The Continuing Crisis. Wishing does not dispose of it. The problem in most of the third world is overwhelming and immediate. It is asserted (without elaboration) that the Programme "would result in world population growth during this period (1995-2015)

and beyond at levels close to" the UN 1992 low projection (section 1.4) and that it would lead to world population stabilization in the next century (section 6.1). The Programme is more optimistic than its technical advisers.[3]

Let us look at the low projection. To take Africa, because it is the most desperate continent: it would require that average fertility (TFR) decline from 5.9 children now (and 6.4 in sub-Saharan Africa) to 2.31 in 2015-2020 and stabilize at 1.7 in 45 years — a 70 percent reduction in a region that has achieved only a 10 percent reduction since 1950. For India, the required decline is from 3.6 now to 1.5 before 2030. The low projection is a tough and unlikely scenario even with massive efforts on all feasible measures to reduce fertility.[4]

Let us look at another UN projection (see figure). It shows what will happen to population growth if fertility stays where it is now. For comparison, I have included the UN's conventional high, medium and low fertility projections.

What that "constant fertility" curve dramatizes is that the third world is less than half way to manageable fertility levels. The same constant fertility projection made a generation ago would have looked even worse, but the war is far from won. Excluding China (which has had remarkable success in reducing fertility, partly through the very means the feminists decry), overall third world fertility has declined less than one-third since the 1950s, to 4.2. It must still be cut in half again, to about 2.1, if population is **ever** to stabilize. (That is, barring a disastrous rise in mortality, which is quite possible.) That's a crisis.

All other long term world population projections (UN, World Bank, Census Bureau) are optimistic. They all assume declines in third world fertility. They simply posit different timetables.

Arithmetically, growth is faster right now than it has ever been, about 90 million each year.

The UN demographers remark that the "constant fertility" projection is unrealistic. Of course it is; it's absurd. The projection for 2150 would mean about 2000 square feet (that is 45 by 45 feet) of ice-free land per human, including deserts, mountains, forests, plains, farms, cities, and highways. Famine and disease will arrest that curve before it goes very far. The point the "constant fertility" curve makes is that human population growth must stop, and very soon, and the central question before any population conference should be "How do we continue the progress and get to replacement fertility or below? Now."

For that matter, the "high" and "medium" projections may be nearly as unrealistic. There is no assurance that a world of deteriorating environment and resources can support 28 or even 12 billion people, particularly if the more prosperous countries in the third world insist (quite understandably) on trying to live like the first world does.

We are living through a tragedy. World population was about 2.5 billion in the 1950s. With the new technologies available, such a population could reasonably have aspired to a world in which all could live at a decent level. Instead, the technology was used to reduce mortality long before we addressed fertility, thus generating the population explosion that now makes a mockery of the hopes. There was a "baby boom" of sorts in much of the world, adding to population growth. Belated efforts to reduce fertility, flawed as they may be, have at least begun to correct the demographic imbalance without leaving it to famine and pestilence to do the job. Now we are being told to abandon that approach and trust the militant feminists that investment in their issues alone will do the job. The world doesn't have that kind of money, that kind of time, or probably that faith.

Not a crisis? The 1994 UN Human Development Report says that Afghanistan, Angola, Haiti, Iraq, Mozambique, Burma, the Sudan and Zaire are facing "collapse", with Algeria, Burundi, Rwanda (the report was prepared before the current civil war), the Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone close behind. It did not list Bangladesh, where six million people have applied for perhaps 5000 U.S. visas that will come available under the brutal "visa lottery" created by the Immigration Act of 1990.[5] Right now there are famines brewing in Africa that have put about 20 million people at risk of starvation this year.[6]

Scientists — the National Academy of Sciences and the Royal Academy; a joint statement by some 1670 scientists (including most living Nobel laureates in science); 57 of the academies of science at a recent meeting in New Delhi — tell us in different ways of the urgency of stopping population growth. A Nobel laureate says that "The human race now appears to be getting close to the limits of global food productive capacity based on present technologies... (Many agricultural experts) are desperately worried about the food problem."[7] Scientists were not included in the U.S. PrepCom III delegation.

To Demolish a Myth... The proposal to let women and couples "freely and responsibly" decide about child-bearing is taken intact from a tortured compromise between those who wanted to set goals and those who opposed them at the Bucharest population conference 20 years ago. There is no rationale for assuming that "responsible" free choice will, unguided, lead to the socially desirable level of fertility, and U.S. experience suggests otherwise. It is myth masquerading as truth.

Of the hundreds of millions of people who will be making love tonight, how many will be thinking about a socially responsible population policy?

This is the first century in which human population growth has been fast enough, and the numbers large enough, to threaten our own future, and that is what makes this century different from any earlier one. A difference of 10 percent in world fertility —between 2.0 and 2.2 — makes the difference between eventual stabilization and continued growth toward the mathematically absurd. A difference of one child — between average fertility of 1.7 and 2.7, for instance — is literally a matter of billions of people within the next century — and fertility surveys indicate that most third world women presently want more than three children. If no effort is made to steer this vector, beyond offering homilies about free choice, then the Cairo conference has nothing to offer to the governments that must face the population problem or perish.

The Players and their Agendas

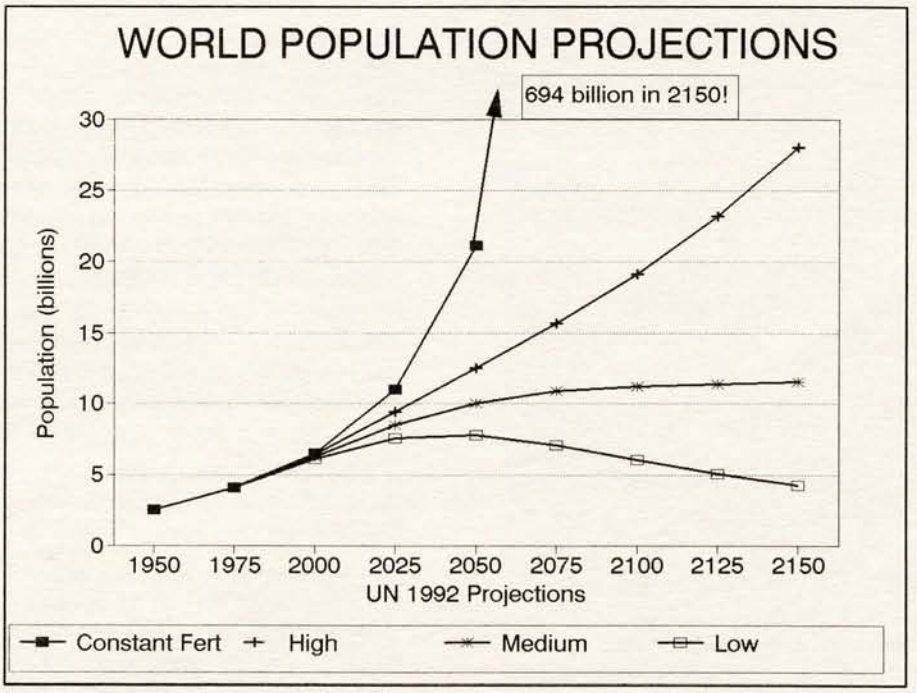
The Vatican. The women's movement and the Vatican have been at odds at least since the issue first arose of ordaining women priests. Perhaps, in retrospect, the lasting importance of the ICPD will be that it is bringing that conflict to a head. The Vatican has of course opposed all birth control other than the "rhythm method" for years. Under Pope John Paul II, the position on all population issues has toughened, and in response, feminist criticism of the Pope has become sharper and more explicit.

The Pope in March convened all the ambassadors to the Holy See, in a most unusual step, and top Vatican officials lectured them on the evils of birth control. He has privately lectured President Clinton and publicly chastised Nafis Sadik (Executive Director of the UN Population Fund [UNFPA] and Secretary-General of the ICPD) calling contraception "immoral", abortion a "heinous evil" and sterilization "a grave threat to human dignity and liberty when

promoted as part of a population policy." He has condemned "propaganda and misinformation directed at persuading couples that they must limit their families to one or two children." He is writing an encyclical on abortion. Following his lead, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote President Clinton, saying his administration was acting as an "agent of coercion" by promoting birth control and abortion.[8] In a unanimous message, 114 cardinals called the promotion of "artificial" population control "cultural imperialism."

The Pope has thus taken on both the radical feminists, who seek more subsidized family planning including abortions, and the population movement, which is trying to persuade the world that people must indeed limit their families.

The Pope has increasingly couched the issue in terms of family values. In an encyclical in October 1993 and subsequent speeches, he has asserted that the traditional family is not just a Christian ideal but a "natural right" and that his position is an "absolute truth". He denounced the draft Programme for creating "models for hedonism and permissiveness."



The Vatican observer at PrepCom III lectured it for lacking "a coherent moral vision".[9] The conference organizers retaliated. Conference Chairman Fred Sai chided the representative for his language, and several women's groups — including Catholic groups — called a press conference the next day that was highly critical of the church. The battle is indeed joined.

One can only speculate as to how much the Vatican position hinders the advance of family planning. On one hand, Italy and Spain, both ostensibly Catholic countries, have among the world's lowest fertility rates; they apparently have become used to drawing their own conclusions. The progress of contraceptive use in many third world Catholic countries also suggests that the Vatican's position is not seen as necessarily compelling. On the other hand, the Vatican can hinder the creation of family planning programs in Catholic countries where it is politically unwise to take on the church. Moreover, the Vatican's position must inhibit family planning in Latin America and parts of Africa, where the population problem is worst and where the advice of the parish priest is taken very seriously.

The Vatican guards its decision processes very well, but there are some rumblings suggesting that movement is afoot. The church has, after all, learned to adjust over time to other inconvenient realities, such as the heliocentric solar system. Change, clearly, will not come in the tenure of the present Pope, who has made this his personal issue. He is old, however, and maneuvering may be under way.

A peculiar thing happened in June. The Italian Bishops' Conference released a study by the Papal Academy of Science, entitled "Too Many Births?" It argued that birth control is necessary "to prevent the emergence of insoluble problems. ...To deny responsibility towards future generations" would have devastating consequences, especially in the third world. It suggested that the birth rate must not "notably exceed the level of two children per couple".[10] The release of the paper, and the timing, can hardly have been accidental.

The Vatican reacted in fury. It released two successive statements denying that the Academy was entitled to "be an expression of church teachings or the pastoral strategies of the Holy See." The second statement went on to suggest an effort on the part of "some commentators" to "weaken the position of the Holy See in the international arena by means of self-serving and misleading information".[11] The Pope himself reiterated that his position is unchanged, and a conference of 114 cardinals unanimously endorsed a reaffirmation of church doctrine drafted by Cardinal O'Connor of New York.

Perhaps those inside know something we do not. A reporter asked about the Pope's health, and was given a "no comment" by a Vatican spokesman, who added that "every pope is in good health until he dies". A succession may well be accompanied by a power struggle over the extent to which the church adapts to modern problems and to feelings that are widely held even within the church. Certainly, many in the church must be aware that the Vatican multiplies its problems by confounding its support for the traditional family — where it might find considerable support among people who dislike the permissiveness promoted by the radical feminists — with its position on the population issue.

Militant Feminists. The president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) told a press conference at PrepCom III that "there can be no advancement in the world if the status of women is not improved". That was the tone of the meeting.[12]

The intensity of feminist opposition to any outside interference in women's right to "control their own bodies" can be measured by a U.S. domestic development quite separate from the Cairo preparations. The State of New Jersey refuses additional welfare payments for children conceived by women after they go on welfare. That rule has been challenged by a remarkable coalition of some 85 organizations that are traditionally at each other's throat, ranging from conservative religious and antiabortion groups to pro-choice groups, spearheaded by NOW and the ACLU. The NOW argument is that it "violates women's constitutional rights to privately make decisions about conception and childbirth without governmental intrusion" — and with a governmental subsidy, apparently.[13]

Some of the activists at the PrepCom attacked even the idea of giving priority to unmet needs for contraception. The U.S. Women of Color (USWOC) position paper for PrepCom III said "industrialized countries should reduce poverty by tackling social and economic

imbalances, not just by pushing contraceptives. We don't want to wait until the 'unmet need' for contraceptives has been satisfied before realizing that we have utterly neglected to boost social and economic progress and failed to alleviate poverty."[14] This is a strong reminder of the disinterest or hostility many Blacks feel toward population planning. They won't be appeased; they must, like the feminists, come to believe that stopping population growth is to their own benefit.

The agenda of the militant feminists can perhaps best be seen by looking in detail at the product of PrepCom III.

The Draft "Programme of Action"

The Programme is not really a program. A program states a specific target and specific steps to achieve it. The Programme is a wish list, and a very long one.

Population. It is not really about population and development. The words appear periodically, usually together, but there is no real discussion of the connections.

It is certainly not about population growth. In a draft 118 pages long, four perfunctory paragraphs describe world population growth. By very rough count (the format permits no precision), there are about 1170 individual action proposals in the Programme (including much duplication and overlap.) I find only a dozen proposals that directly address population growth; several will be quoted here. Meeting unmet needs for contraception is treated as an aspect, not of slowing population growth, but of assuring "reproductive rights and sexual health", avoiding AIDS or minimizing the need for abortion.

Of 16 chapters, one is labelled "Population Growth and Structure", and most of it is given over to the protection of children, elderly people, minorities, indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities. All are valid objects of social policy, but the proposals have very little to do with what happens to world population in the next few decades.

It is asserted from time to time (e.g. section 3.5) that "population policies should be integrated into..." the development of other programs." In one place (section 3.9), it is said that "To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, Governments should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies." Whatever that means.

The nearest thing to a recommendation on population policy (section 6.4) is that "Countries that have not completed their demographic transition should take effective steps in this regard within the context of their social and economic development and with full respect of human rights. Countries that have concluded the demographic transition should take necessary steps to optimize their demographic trends (sic) within the context of their social and economic development." (It turns out that "necessary steps" means economic development, alleviating poverty, improving women's status, education including sex education, and health care including ["reproductive health and family planning services,"...]) This is a call to arms?

Nowhere is it said that population growth **should** stop. Nowhere are growing countries urged to give a high priority to stopping (or even slowing) population growth.

Targets and goals for population and fertility are explicitly avoided (though section 7.10 admits that they are legitimate tools for governments if they do not set targets or quotas for family planning providers.) Early in the ICPD process, Nafis Sadik proposed targets for population and fertility in 2015. In the face of the overwhelming opposition to "coercion", the targets quietly disappeared. At the start of PrepCom III she said that "There is now an international consensus that we should invest in people, especially in women, and let them make the choices about family size..."[15] The Programme says that "Governments and the international community should use the full means at their disposal to support the principle of voluntary choice in family planning." (section 7.13)

The Programme is negative about any stronger action. It repeatedly warns against "coercion" and "intimidation", and "Governments are encouraged to focus most of their efforts toward meeting their population and development objectives through education and voluntary measures rather than schemes involving incentives and disincentives."(section 7.20)

Above all, the brief treatment of population is notable for its placidity. On the environmental connection: "Demographic factors, combined with poverty and lack of access to resources in some areas, and excessive consumption and wasteful production in others, cause or exacerbate problems of environmental degradation and resource depletion and thus inhibit sustainable development." (section 3.25) There are no specifics. Nothing is said about the connections between population growth and land degradation, intensive agriculture, desertification, water supplies, soil acidification, climate change or species extinction that the scientists are warning us about.

Elsewhere, the Programme treats population growth, if it is mentioned, as a hindrance to improving the "quality of life" or "sustained economic growth". The authors have yet to discover that "sustained growth" is a mathematical impossibility on a finite Earth. That is why reducing fertility becomes so critically important.

In short, no serious guidance is offered on population issues; the draft Programme instead seeks to discourage any effort to deal with them directly.

Women, and Other Agendas. The Programme is reticent about population, but it is full of explicit recommendations on a multitude of topics, from female genital mutilation (which comes up repeatedly) to old folks' homes. Fundamentally, it is a plea for women's emancipation and an exhaustive list of the things that should be done for (and occasionally by) women to achieve it. Most of four chapters is given over to women's issues, and proposals for specific assistance to women are scattered through the other chapters.

Of the 1170 or so action proposals, maybe half are endless administrative proposals about cooperation, research, funding, NGO participation and the like. Of the others, 285 are directed to improving women's status. They go pretty far. A proposal to "eliminate stereotypes" (section 4.19) sounds like a veiled demand for censorship to enforce the politically correct view of the relationship between sexes. Reverse discrimination is called for in educating young girls. (section 4.20)

A UN Conference on Women is scheduled for 1995, in Beijing. I wonder what new they will find to say, other than criticizing their hosts for China's family planning practices.

The proposals concerning the status of women at least have a presumptive connection with population dynamics. Many of the remaining 250 or so proposals don't. They are about the population issue only in the sense that people are population.

They deal largely with the protection of children, the right to education and health services, the search for a cure for AIDS and the support of AIDs sufferers, the rights of migrants, minorities, the aged, and the needs of the "underserved" components of the population — so broadly defined as to include everybody but adult, non-elderly, non-minority, non-migrant, non-indigenous male suburbanites. (section 12.20)

The Family. The Programme calls for an end to coercion and discrimination related to the "plurality of forms" of the family and "other unions". It avoids explicit reference to homosexual families but calls for governments and employers to assist single parent families. (sections 5.2-5.4)

It is highly permissive about sexual morality. The sections on "reproductive health" are a paean to happy sex. "Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being... in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. ... Sexual health is the integration of somatic, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of sexual being, in ways that are positively enriching and that enhance personality, communication and love, and thus the notion of sexual health implies a positive approach to human sexuality..." (section 7.1)

Times change. Two generations ago, that sort of message would have been mailed in a plain brown envelope.

Adolescent fecundity is an important source of population growth, but the drafters try to accommodate to it rather than influence it. Nafis Sadik said at a press conference that "I told him (the Pope) that I can't preach to young people about their behavior."[16] The Programme says "Sexually active adolescents will require special family planning information, counselling and services, including contraceptive services, and those who become pregnant will require special support from their families and community during pregnancy and early child care. Adolescents must be fully involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of such information and services..." (section 7.45)

There is nothing about discouraging the pregnancies. Section 8.24 on women's nutrition includes counselling to delay pregnancy, but only for the physically immature. Voluntary abstinence is encouraged (section 8.35) only as a way to avoid AIDS.

Most of these proposals would if anything promote population growth. There is one suggestion that might work the other way: "The equal participation of women and men in all areas of family and household responsibilities, including [family planning], childrearing and housework, should be promoted and encouraged by Governments." (section 4.26) By extension, the drafters are calling for governments to promote the two-earner family. In conservative societies, this is not likely to happen very fast, which in turn means that — if the drafters even thought of it as a way of promoting lower fertility — its effect may be far in the future.

Other agendas turn up. The UN promotes its role, including a proposal that it compile data on indigenous people "in full collaboration with indigenous people[s] and their organizations" (section 6.26), but without mentioning the governments involved. This would raise hackles in a number of countries, including ours. Advocacy groups got a whole chapter urging that they be included in official policy formulation. In the chapter on international migration, somebody slipped in a reference (still bracketed) to "the right to family reunification" (section 10.12), which would raise hob with many countries' immigration laws if they paid attention to it. The document is full of these little excursions.

For a conference on population, they have wandered pretty far afield.

"Breadth" and Illusions. Most of the action proposals would require funding, and the total is incalculable. There is an *Arabian Nights* quality to all this. For one example, to improve the quality of life in cities, "Governments should increase the capacity and competence of city and municipal authorities to manage urban development, to safeguard the environment, to respond to the needs of all citizens, including urban squatters, for personal safety, basic infrastructure and services, to eliminate health and social problems, including problems of drugs and criminality, and problems resulting from overcrowding and disasters, and to provide people with alternatives to living in areas prone to natural and man-made disasters. ... to promote the integration of migrants from rural areas into urban areas and to develop and improve their income-earning capability by facilitating their access to employment, credit, vocational training and transportation, with special attention to the situation of women workers and women heads of households. Child-care centres should be established, and special protection and rehabilitation programmes should be established for street children." (sections 9.14 & 9.15) A lovely dream.

On international immigration: the best way to deal with immigration is for "recipient" countries to help the "sending" countries to make life at home "viable" so people will not want to leave. (sections 10.1 and 10.3) This is to be achieved by "ensuring a better economic balance between developed (and) developing countries...", by "defusing international and national tensions before they escalate", by promoting good governance and democracy and ensuring that the human rights of minorities and indigenous peoples are respected, by improving education, nutrition and health, by ensuring environmental protection, reviewing tariffs and increasing access to world markets, creating more jobs (and, incidentally, supporting "population-relevant programs" that are never described.) Poof! just like that. The irreverent thought arises: am I supposed to take this seriously? In this brave new world, people might well decide to stay home, but apparently nobody looked into either the price tag or the realism of the proposals. Similar flights of imagination appear throughout the Programme (see for instance sections 5.9 to 5.13 on the family.)

Funding. Specific funding targets are set for a few programs. They are all still "bracketed." The annual costs in 2000 are estimated as follows: (a) family planning, $10.2 billion; (b) "reproductive health", $5 billion, not including expenditures in the "overall health budgets"; (c) preventing AIDS and STDs (sexually transmitted diseases), $1.3 billion; and (d) research and analysis, $500 million. These numbers rise through 2015, but not as fast as current third world population growth. "Up to two-thirds" would be met by the countries themselves.

There is a hooker in there. The "delivery costs" for the other items are hidden in the "family planning" account. Those costs represent 65 per cent of the total. If they are distributed by project, reproductive health changes to $8 billion, family planning to $6 billion, and AIDS/STDs to $2.2 billion.

The cynical and wise have learned to read the fine print when population or family planning targets are announced. There is an old habit of robbing family planning accounts for other activities, particularly for other public health uses when the programs are commingled. It has been a problem for the U.S. AID population program for years. Even now, as the Clinton administration points with pride to its budget proposal to raise the population assistance appropriation to $585 million, AID has said it plans to set aside some of the funds for reproductive health, female education and "women's empowerment" projects.[17]

There is no effort to cost out the rest of the action proposals, except to say they will require "substantially increased investments" and to propose that 20 percent of public sector expenditures and of official development assistance go to "the social sectors", especially to poverty eradication. (Section 13.23; this is the UN "20:20" formula.) Section 14.11 reiterates the UNCED (Rio de Janiero) target of doubling donors' development assistance to 0.7 percent of GNP.

What to Expect from Cairo

In Cairo, the militant feminists will almost certainly win the battle with the Vatican. The draft Programme will probably not

be much changed. With some 180 governments represented, with about 1000 NGOs on the sidelines, there isn't that much time. There is much bureaucratic momentum and much "face" committed to this draft. Some references to reproductive health, family planning and abortion may be softened to meet the objections of governments responsive to the Vatican. Some of those Governments and some conservative Arab countries may refuse to endorse the Programme, or sign on with written reservations. The expenditure targets will probably be rephrased in more general terms. Otherwise, the tone of the document is pretty well cast in concrete.

The Descent to Irrelevancy. If that is so, the document will leave little imprint. It offers no real advice about demographic policy, except to back off. As to all those other recommendations: governments are in no position to mobilize new resources in response to an impossibly long wish list from Cairo. Donors are not undertaking new commitments, as the recent UN conferences on Sustainable Development and on Small Island Developing States have demonstrated. Societies will change and women's status will probably improve, but not because the UN told them to.

National delegations (including ours) tend to accept rather casually the generalizations that emerge from such UN conferences. They are achieved by a loose consensus process, are not formally signed or ratified, and the U.S. Government does not consider them legally binding. Some of it gets pretty unreal. Would the U.S. Government really consider endorsing the two-wage-earner family? would it commit itself to "promote and encourage" men sharing housework?

The Feminists. It is hard to say how important these international circuses are. This one certainly has served to focus press attention briefly on population — or on the players' agendas. The Programme will seldom be read — it is terribly repetitious and almost unreadable — but it will be cited by interest groups to legitimize future demands for governments to act on the proposals that interest them. And therein perhaps lies the importance of the ICPD.

The Cairo conference, even more than the Rio conference on the environment that preceded it, generated a massive mobilization of militant feminists and feminist groups. They have strongly influenced the evolution of the U.S. position. They have largely shaped the Programme. At home, their advocacy has resulted in the proposal mentioned above, to shift U.S. AID funds from family planning to feminist programs. They have become a force. They probably like it, and governments can expect to hear more from them.

The U.S. Role

For a change, the U.S. administration is promoting international population assistance. It has raised budgetary appropriations and restored the U.S. support for UNFPA and private third world population assistance programs. It has been willing to tough it out with the Vatican and endorse language on abortion, which, in a felicitous new turn of phrase, it says should be "legal, safe and rare." (It would face a firestorm in its domestic constituency if it caved in on that one.)

The administration has not addressed U.S. population growth, and the draft Programme offers little help, but that is a topic for another FORUM paper.

Population and Politics. In the Cairo conference process, the U.S. voice has changed. The Vice President and Department of State Counselor Tim Wirth probably understand the dangers of population growth as well as any U.S. political leaders, but the Vice President has been silent — he will be at Cairo and may recover his voice then — and Wirth has shifted his rhetoric to accommodate his new constituency. (In a March 30th speech on the ICPD, he said "I would suggest that the empowerment, employment and involvement of women must be the overriding catalyst for common purpose in the journey to and from Cairo. At the end of this century, the extent to which we fostered the transition to sustainable development will be measured in part by our success in refocusing scarce resources and redirecting national priorities on behalf of women..." He described 7 objectives, all of which were directed toward women's issues; only one of them, "reproductive health services", included a reference to "voluntary family planning.")

There may be good political reasons for handing the topic over to the militant feminists. They are a constituency that can cause trouble if thwarted. Generalizations at Cairo about "free choice" and support for feminist causes avoid the tough and controversial issues — migration and governmental involvement in human fertility — that would arise if the conference got serious about population. The President may feel he hardly needs any more problems right now. Why not pay off the ladies and stay away from the tough issues?

Tim Wirth remarked that "women's groups pretty much drove this."[18] Not all women. Women do not speak with one voice. I am willing to bet that Phyllis Shlaffly was not invited, or any of the women who agree with her. If the full range of women's voices had been invited to participate, there would have been cacophony. The U.S. official delegation to PrepCom III included 10 private sector advisers, 9 of them women, several of whom represented women's groups. This sort of presence in an official delegation may well be unique, and Wirth has remarked that cooperation with the NGO interest groups at PrepCom was also very close.

I suspect that the Department of State stumbled into this relationship rather than thinking it through. Undeniably, it has allowed voices to be heard that were ignored before. On the other hand, it bypasses the traditional ways of reconciling different interests in our diverse society.

In leaning heavily on feminist advocacy groups, the government fails to hear the range of views on their issues, and this may narrow the administration's support base rather than widening it.

There is something in the Programme for many other interest groups: minorities; immigrant advocates; refugees; the education lobby; the elderly; people with disabilities, etc. The danger is backlash. There is no way that even a modest fraction of the Programme proposals can be delivered in most third world countries, and it may create false expectations even in the U.S.

Whether or not it is good politics, the government's approach leads to bad population policy, because it is not listening to the voices of bioscientists, demographers and others who might have tempered the advocacy approach reflected in the Programme. Princeton demographer Charles Westoff says: "So much potential common ground exists in the goals of the family planning movement and in women's concerns for their reproductive health and rights —as well as for improving their status — that it would be perverse if extremist feminist groups managed to deflect a worldwide effort to address the population question head-on."[19] Joseph Speidel remarked that "they never face the issue of what to do if resources are scarce, and they are."[20] Three population analysts argue that "... although development and social change create conditions that encourage smaller family size, contraceptives are the best contraceptive.... independently of the effect of social and economic changes — family-planning programs played a significant role in reducing fertility in developing countries between 1975 and 1990. ... changes in contraceptive use and in fertility depend as much on the strength of a country's family-planning movement as on its economic development."[21] This is a far cry from what the administration has been hearing from the women's groups.

Where Now?

The New Agenda. One hears a constant refrain: this is a new and broader approach to population policy. It isn't really new. Improvements in the educational and economic status for women contribute to fertility decline, and the correlation has long been recognized. Population advocates have an interest in women's status, and in investments to achieve it. What is new is the fixity with which militant feminist groups are attempting (a) to subvert the existing "narrow" population programs, and (b) to divert resources and attention from population programs to women's issues.

The question is: how far should U.S. policy commit itself to the proposition that the way to stop world population growth is to put our money and effort into women's rights and women's programs?

If It Ain't Broke... Running a population program without population goals is about like trying to build a road without deciding where it should go.

Human fertility has been declining, and some of that decline is legitimately attributable to the single-minded effort by AID and other population organizations to make family planning broadly available, to get out the message about population, and to recruit governmental and opinion leaders. It is possible to achieve something without achieving everything at once — the PPFA speaker not withstanding — and a focused program may be better than spurious "breadth".

The draft Programme, by trying to be "broad", has lost all focus. Modernization, eventually, results in lower fertility. High fertility and resultant population growth throughout much of the third world are delaying that modernization and perhaps making it impossible. The issue is how to get birth rates down without waiting for the traditional "demographic transition", which may never happen in much of the third world.

The drafters of the Programme have a certain vision of the new world they want, and they want it all at once. Prescriptions for the drastic social changes proposed in the Programme not only encounter immense traditionalist opposition and inertia; they presuppose the availability of enormous funds. They may bear fruit over time, but it will take time. Do the militant feminists themselves really believe that, in the next two decades, their exhortations will be heeded by governments and societies everywhere, that discrimination against women will end, that funding for the Programme's endless list of causes will somehow materialize, and that fertility will obediently drop so far, so fast?

On the other hand, the traditional "narrow" approach offers investments with tangible and immediate results — and it helps the women by easing the burdens of motherhood and by improving women's status as they escape the treadmill of constant pregnancy.

Pursuing the Possible. The Programme has gotten it backwards. At one point, it says "Eradication of poverty will contribute to slowing population growth and to achieving early population stabilization." (section 3.15) The problem is that you can't get there from here. With the working age population growing some 60 million per year, and rising, and the ILO reporting that one-third of those in the labor force do not earn a minimal subsistence wage, this "solution" simply ducks the issue. A better bet is that a successful population policy would help reduce poverty.

The Programme calls for universal health care, universal primary education, jobs, and leadership roles for women, in a time when unemployment is rising, national budgets are caught in the increasing costs of dealing with pollution and unemployment and their consequences, living standards are declining, and many governments are impotent in the face of overwhelming immediate problems. You cannot spend enough to achieve those goals when you don't have enough even now. You must identify those things that will do most to match the reality with the dream.

Direct population programs have the advantage of simplicity. If necessary, they can still be pursued even in pretty chaotic conditions. They are easier to control; one can audit a contraceptive delivery program more easily than an effort to assist third world governments (which may well be in the hands of self-enriching dictators) to promote women's rights, improve their educational systems and provide jobs for the poor. And it is much, much cheaper.

Priorities. I would urge that at Cairo the U.S. Government ignore most of the rhetoric to which it has contributed, and that it look before it leaps to change the way the international population issue is approached. I propose a shorter "wish list":

1. Meet unmet needs for contraception, i.e. make it available to those who want it but cannot obtain or afford it. (To his credit, Tim Wirth has regularly listed this as the first priority. The ICPD Secretariat obviously thinks it is central.) Make this the top priority in our entire foreign development assistance program, even if we must contribute more than our "share." Keep "population" as a budgetary line item so the funds don't get siphoned off. (The administration's new foreign assistance bill would remove that protection.)

2. Support the expansion of third world family planning facilities and services wherever possible, including unconventional approaches such as commercial distribution of contraceptives, until there are no significant populations uncovered. Don't wait to create full-fledged health clinics, but use them where they exist. (Taiwan began its successful family planning program in the 1950s simply by making contraceptives available and making sure people knew where. Fertility dropped quickly, not only in the first test neighborhoods, but in nearby areas, because the word spread.)

3. Back it up by continuing the efforts to convince third world leaders that the population issue is important, and they should lead. Say the things that will not be said at Cairo.

4. Endeavor to reinstate **goals** in the international population dialogue. Numerical targets are for each country to decide individually, but the **two child family** — stop at two — is worth considering as a simple and comprehensible way of phrasing a worldwide target. It is a good target even if it isn't reached, and nations that come close would achieve a period of below-replacement fertility to stop population momentum. "Stop at two" means fertility somewhere around 1.5, because some women have no children, or one.[22]

5. Give the next priority in our developmental assistance to women's and children's health, coordinated with family planning services. (Don't integrate them completely, or the family planning funds will disappear.) Discreetly encourage proposals to promote the status of women, and point to the demographic consequence — lower fertility — as one practical argument for doing so. Beyond that, support for education and jobs for women are legitimate areas and would promote lower fertility, but there are fiscal limits to how much the U.S. can do.

6. On the issue of incentives and disincentives: encourage third world countries to learn from the experience of countries such as Singapore that have used them effectively, recognizing that it is their decision. People are unlikely to buy onto the "two child family" without leadership and self-interest pushing them.

The militant feminists are going to press their advantage. One can understand why, given their long memories of being the "second sex". The problem is that they see this as a zero-sum game, when it

is not. Women, men and children all suffer from the population crisis, and all gain if can be controlled. The feminists have compiled a list of recommendations that are unattainable under present world conditions, are related tangentially if at all to the population issue, and divert attention and funding from that issue. In their own interest —and that of women generally — they should look again at their priorities.

Sound Advice Forgotten. In 1991, the Population Crisis Committee analyzed the U.S. performance in international population efforts and concluded: "The U.S. population assistance program... has been a bold and pioneering effort for much of its history. In less than a generation, the program has significantly expanded the availability and use of modern contraceptive technology and lowered family size in many developing countries. By helping to slow the pace of world population growth, the U.S. foreign aid program has made an enormous contribution of global importance to the future of the world."

The report went on to say that "AID's programs have generally had more measurable impact than those supported by other donors. To a far greater degree, AID has focused resources on increasing the availability of family planning services..." It praised AID's "unique partnership with private institutions working in the population field."

The report went on, however, to say that "In AID's other development programs there has been little systematic focus on activities, such as female education, which could potentially reinforce population and family planning investments. AID should far more aggressively seek to exploit potential synergies between its population and other development activities, especially female education and child survival programs."[23]

There, I believe, is the sensible amalgam between programs directed explicitly at population stabilization (or reduction) and programs, legitimate in themselves, directed toward women's well-being and the nurture of children.

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NOTES

1 *New York Times* 6-15-94, p.1.

2 Martha F.Riche, "How Far Is It to Cairo?" (Washington: Population Reference Bureau, *Population Today*, April 1994, p.3.)

3 Two ICPD Secretariat papers (*Background Note on Goals for the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994, 6-2-94;* and *Background Note on the Resource Requirements for Population Programmes in the Years 2000-2015*, 6-23-94) suggest that "satisfying existing unmet need for contraceptive and reproductive health services and additional needs likely to be generated over the next two decades could lead to a contraceptive prevalence level in the developing world of at least 69 percent." This would be consistent with a fertility level somewhat closer to the UN medium projection than to the low projection. The statement is based on sample surveys of unmet needs and historical trends in the use of family planning, raised by a factor reflecting the hope that better reproductive health care will increase the demand for family planning.

4 The Programme uses two somewhat different 1992 UN projections: The intermediate range *Current Population Prospects, the 1992 Revision* and the *Long-range World Population Projections, 1950-2150*. In this discussion and the following graph, I have used the latter (p.12 and Table 4).

5 Reuter, Dhaka, 6-20-94, 03:43.

6 Estimate by U.S. AID Administrator Brian Attwood after a fact finding tour of East Africa. He cited population growth as a principal cause. Reuter, Nairobi, 5-31-94, 13:05:00.

7 Henry W. Kendall and David Pimentel, "Constraints on the Expansion of the Global Food Supply", *Ambio* Vol.23, May 1994, pp.198-205. See also interview with Dr. Kendall by Nick Ludington, AP, Washington, 5-26-94, 18:00:00.

8 Philip Pullella, "Vatican Summons Envoys over Population Issues", Reuter, Vatican City, 3-25-94, 06:56:00. AP, Vatican City, 4-17-94, 09:35. AP, Washington, 5-31-94, 16:24.

9 Susan Chira, "Women Campaign for New Plan to Curb the World's Population", *New York Times*, 4-13-94, pp.A1, A12.

10 *Washington Times*, 6-11-94, p.11. DPA Rome, 6-11, 0720. *New York Times* 6-16-94, p.A4. The Academy is a body of lay scientists, not necessarily Catholic. In December 1993, the German Bishops' Conference released a document, *Population Policy and Development*, that said the church "has to respect responsible (family planning) decisions made by couples."

11 AP Vatican City, 6-18-94, 16:34 EDT.

12 ICPD Newsletter No. 14, April 1994, p.7.

13 William Claibourne, "New Jersey Effort...", *Washington Post* 3-3-94.

14 UNFPA *Populi*, May 1994, p.10.

15 ICPD Newsletter No.14, April 1994, p.5.

16 Greg Burke, "Pope Warns U.N. Not to Limit Family Size", Reuter, Vatican City, 3-18-94, 08:29:00.

17 Private communication from Population Action International, 7-5-94.

18 See Susan Chira article cited note 9.

19 Charles F. Westoff, "Finally, Population Control", *New York Times Magazine*, 2-6-94, p.32.

20 See Susan Chira article note 9.

21 Bryant Robey, Shea O. Rutstein and Leo Morris, "The Fertility Decline in Developing Countries", *Scientific American*, December 1993, p.65.

22 See Lindsey Grant, *The Two Child Family* (NPG FORUM, May 1994.)

23 Shanti R. Conly, J.Joseph Speidel and Sharon Camp, *U.S. Population Assistance: Issues for the 1990s* (Washington: PCC, now Population Action International, 1991.)

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