

Statement to The Hague Forum, 8-12 February 1999

As written:

INTERVENTION OF **MONSIGNOR FRANK J. DEWANE**

HEAD OF THE **HOLY SEE DELEGATION**

HAGUE FORUM
10 February 1999

The Holy See takes this opportunity to thank the organizers of the Forum for the invitation and the Dutch Government for its kind hospitality.

The International Conference on Population and Development marked an important moment in the world's understanding of the interrelationship between population and development. For the first time the linkage between population and development was the focus of consideration. All forms of coercion in the implementation of population policies were rejected. The family was recognized as the fundamental unit of society based on marriage and entitled to comprehensive support and protection. Strong impetus was given to the improvement of the status of women throughout the world, particularly with regard to their health, and their full and equal participation in development. The expanding phenomenon of migration was considered along with its impact on development. There were many insights into these and other issues, and the Holy See was able to join in supporting the outcome of the Cairo Conference with a partial consensus.

In the five years since Cairo, the world has attempted to move from insights and visions to reality. In this context, the Holy See continues to insist that human beings are at the center of concerns for development. The dignity of the human person must be respected in all its aspects. As the Cairo Document states, this is to be done with full respect for the various religious and ethical values and cultural background of each woman and man. Following this statement, Principle One of the Cairo Document states that everyone has the right to life.

In the follow-up process, the Holy See calls for a priority treatment of issues regarding development and insists on two important components: education and the reduction of poverty. However, the disproportion between the funds allocated for reproductive health and those allocated for the elimination of widespread endemic diseases or for education is noted. The Holy See underlines that true development can never be reduced to a merely physical dimension. Sexual and reproductive health must be integrated within an overall concern for the education and well-being of the total person. The ability of a woman to make decisions is not dependent on the reduction of her fertility but on the level of her education.

The role of the family, the basic unit of society, founded on marriage, is forcefully reaffirmed by the Holy See. The family is entitled to comprehensive protection and support, and its rights are to be safeguarded. The context for the exercise of sexual expression by men and women and for their responsibility concerning human reproduction is the family. The

Holy See continues to reject an individualistic concept of sexuality, at times evidenced in the Cairo Document and identified by the Holy Father in his Letter to the Heads of State prior to the Cairo Conference.

Linked closely to the rights of the family is the issue of education for young people in matters pertaining to sexuality and reproduction. The rights and duties of parents cannot be ignored in this regard since this responsibility lies in the first place with them. The State must encourage this duty and not seek to override the rights and responsibilities of parents while at same time invoking an argument supposedly based on rights.

As a phenomenon, migration must be the concern of all states and not only receiving countries. The responsibility of the international community to extend protection and assistance becomes ever more challenging. Migration is closely related to the issues of development and to that of population. The specific commitment to guarantee protection for the family unit of migrants in regular situations needs greater attention.

The Cairo Document states that in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning. In this context, the present practice of “emergency contraception” and use of the RU 486 pill cannot be considered applications of family planning and even less as the exercise of an alleged reproductive right. These abortive practices, camouflaged as means of contraception, are clearly contrary to national legislative systems which grant legal protection and safeguards to life from the moment of conception. Further, there can be no surreptitious recognition of a right to abortion through policies aimed at creating new categories of personal rights or including health services which protect women’s lives by making possible “safe abortion”. The Cairo Document clearly noted, from the very outset, the sovereign right of each country with regard to the Document’s recommendations.

The Holy See continues to deplore recourse to sterilization by the exertion of various types of pressure on patients or by seeking to disguise this type of intervention often undertaken due to quotas with regard to fertility. This is raw coercion and the denial of an individual’s true rights. In such cases, the commitment to eliminate poverty could be confused with that of eliminating the poor.

At a time when a sort of inflation of rights is sometimes to be observed, it is desirable to point out that rights will languish if, at the same time, the obligations and responsibilities of each and everyone, in other words the moral dimension of human rights, are not more clearly perceived.

The aging of the world’s population merits immediately attention, particularly in light of recent revisions of the demographic estimates released by the UN Population Division. The change in the proportions between those who are economically active and those who are dependent has created strains on pension and health-care services. This trend will likely continue. Governments should provide more resources to address this issue.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.