

Statement by Msgr. Janusz Urbanczyk, *Chargé d'Affaires a.i.*
Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations

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Mr. Chairman,

My delegation takes this opportunity to express its best wishes to you and your Bureau for a productive session, and looks forward to working constructively with delegations as we assess the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

According to the report of the Secretary General, no fewer than 80 countries now register a fertility rate below replacement level.¹ These statistics should be a great cause for alarm, as expressed in another report of the Secretary General:

Old-age support ratios, defined as the number of working-age adults per older person in the population, are already low in most countries of the more developed regions and are expected to continue to fall in the coming decades, ensuring continued fiscal pressure on support systems for older people.²

The unsustainable phenomenon of ageing populations can only be resolved by promoting family life and fertility. Support systems for the ageing can only be sustained by a larger, not smaller, next generation, either by paying into a social security system, or by providing intergenerational family support directly.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation wishes to express grave concern over a very proscriptive approach taken in the zero draft of the outcome document, towards the implementation of the ICPD. This approach seems to treat fertility and pregnancy as a disease which must either be prevented or managed via government or outside assistance. While this may well reflect the concerns of certain highly developed countries, on a universal scale it certainly skews the population and development realities for the most part of the developing countries of the world, for whom other issues take greater priority. My delegation is of the view that a more sensible approach should focus less on reducing fertility and more on programs and values which support integral human development,

¹ E/CN.9/2014/5, para. 7

² E/CN.9/2014/3, para. 42

namely: personal, social, and spiritual development. Access to education, economic opportunity, political stability, basic health care, and support for the family should serve as the key priorities for achieving such integral human development.

Mr. Chairman,

An issue of great international sensitivity is an insistent promotion of so-called sexual and reproductive “rights”, almost to the exclusion of any other issue. This reflects an improper overtaking of the ICPD Programme of Action by efforts to promote the legalization and/or liberalization of abortion laws, whether by Member States or some UN Agencies, who openly promote laws providing for legal abortion.³

However, the Programme of Action in no way promotes abortion, but expressly repudiates it as a mean of controlling families or the population. The ICPD denies that it creates any new rights in this regard. Such laws and policies remain the prerogative of individual Member States according to the Programme of Action. All States emphasized at Cairo that Governments should help women avoid recourse to abortion.

Pope Francis recently addressed this issue:

Among the vulnerable for whom the church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenseless and innocent among us. Nowadays efforts are made to deny them their human dignity and to do with them whatever one pleases, taking their lives and passing laws preventing anyone from standing in the way of this. ... [T]he church cannot be expected to change her position on this question... It is not ‘progressive’ to try to resolve problems by eliminating a human life...⁴

Mr. Chairman,

The Holy See continues to serve at the front-line addressing greater global poverty, human rights and development. Through its presence and emphasis on providing quality and affordable education, health care, access to food and respect for all human rights, the Holy See demonstrates that care and compassion for the poor, rather than focusing on fertility reduction, serves as a model for a truly human-centered approach to development.⁵

Thank You Mr. Chairman

³ See OHCHR and UNAIDS, International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights, 2006 Consolidated Version, pg. 35: “Laws should also be enacted to ensure women’s reproductive and sexual rights, ... including safe and legal abortion ...”, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HIV/ConsolidatedGuidelinesHIV.pdf>

⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 213 & 214

⁵ See Pope Francis, Message to the World Council of Churches, 4 October 2013