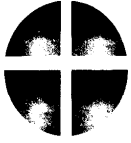


UNITED STATES CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MUSLIM AND CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP ISSUE JOINT STATEMENT ON CAIRO CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

WASHINGTON--Motivated by worldwide discussion of the upcoming United Nations sponsored International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo next week, leaders of the Muslim and Roman Catholic faith in the United States have prepared a joint statement. The statement, calling for a reaffirmation of the decision made at the 1984 Mexico City International Conference, will be released at a joint news conference at the American Muslim Council, 1212 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 400, 10:00 a.m. this Thursday, September 1.

The statement calls abortion evil and the coercion of abortion repugnant. The leaders also join Pope John Paul II, the scholars of Al Azhar University, and leaders throughout the world calling on the Cairo Conference to reaffirm the language of Mexico City in 1984 "that all nations take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning, and whenever possible, provide for the humane treatment and counseling of women who have had recourse to abortion." The statement says that the serious questions and issues facing the Conference provide opportunities to affirm moral principles and overcome selfishness.

The Muslim and Catholic leaders call for nations to address the "development and expansion of the roles of women in society and the educational and health needs of women, which are insufficiently met across the world." The statement pleads that the "language of

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the final text on the issues which are of critical concern to us be unambiguous and not open to opposing interpretations."

The statement represents another step in an ongoing relationship between the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the American Muslim Council.

The full text of the statement is attached.

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**Joint Statement on the Cairo Conference
on Population and Development**

by Dr. Mohammed Aslam Cheema, President, American Muslim
Council
and Archbishop William H. Keeler, President, National
Conference of Catholic Bishops

At the invitation of the American Muslim Council to the
National Conference of Catholic Bishops, we, the Presidents of
these two organizations which have cooperated on several projects
in the past, now issue this joint statement on certain aspects of
the current public discussion of the upcoming Cairo Conference.

This statement represents another step in an ongoing
relationship between our two organizations. We recall other
important steps together, in particular a previous joint
statement on religion and terrorism, issued on April 16, 1993, in
the aftermath of the bombing of the World Trade Center in New
York. That statement was issued with the signatures of Dr.
Cheema's predecessor, Dr. Mahmoud Abu-Saud, and of Archbishop
Keeler, when we condemned acts of terrorism and declared our
agreement on certain general principles. We concluded that
statement by expressing our encouragement that dialogue between
Catholics and Muslims was already taking place in several
American cities.

In 1991, the participants in the first national dialogue
between Catholics and Muslims, which our organizations co-
sponsored, attested that this dialogue would seek to join
together for the realization of common values. Our organizations

co-sponsored a second national dialogue and have cooperated on a number of other projects; especially noteworthy were an interfaith appeal for Balkan refugees and a prayer vigil for peace coinciding with the interfaith prayer vigil hosted by Pope John Paul II in Assisi on January 9, 1993.

This statement on the Cairo Conference, therefore, is that of a partnership with a history and with ongoing consultation. Even now our staff are discussing, in a preliminary way, a proposal to convene our national dialogue on certain aspects of marriage and family life.

The worldwide discussion about the draft Programme of Action for the International Conference on Population and Development, called by the United Nations in Cairo next week has motivated us to make this joint statement today. We draw attention to important values which we share with regard to topics on the agenda. Our positions are based on teachings and moral principles rooted in our earliest traditions.

We share a special reverence for life. For Catholics this is often summarized under the expression "the sanctity of human life," which includes respect for the life and dignity of every human being, born and unborn. Muslims fully agree with this; in addition they recite specific passages in the Holy Quran against the great evil of the killing of children, which at the time of the Prophet often meant female infanticide. Spelled out clearly in the teachings of both traditions is the right of every individual for true development in all dimensions, social,

cultural and spiritual, with justice and equality for all so that every person will have the opportunity to experience the divine gifts of dignity and peace. We agree that care must be taken to distinguish the God-given right to development for every person in the human community and a false individualism that puts self-centered goals before the good of others. Such individualism is antithetical to our understandings of social justice.

We agree that abortion is an evil. The coercion of abortion, whether subtle or overt, is repugnant to us. We join our voices with Pope John Paul II, the scholars of Al Azhar University, and leaders throughout the world calling on the Cairo Conference to reaffirm the decision of the 1984 Mexico City International Conference that all nations should "take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning, and whenever possible, provide for the humane treatment and counseling of women who have had recourse to abortion." Our solemn concern is that, in preparation for this meeting on population and development, access to abortion is being discussed as a policy of population control and even as a legitimate aspect of reproductive health care or fertility regulation. We join all those calling upon nations affirming policies of permissive abortion to cease the massive deaths of the unborn and the severe harm to women who undergo abortions.

For Muslims and Catholics alike, the family is the principal school of virtues, the primary school of religious instruction.

We endorse wholeheartedly the rights of the family to organize its own religious life in the home and under the control of the parents. The family is the basic unit not only for society but for a just and holy society.

A family is a sacred relationship among persons. A family proceeds from the marriage between a man and a woman, and this formative bond of families is divinely mandated. We agree that the union of a wife and husband is intended to be an intimate, exclusive, permanent, and faithful partnership, even though our traditions may have differing practices regarding some of these aspects. Even though we are compassionately aware that there are large numbers of single parent families, we are distressed at current efforts to redefine family and other developments that devalue marriage.

Our views of the family, based upon revelation as we each understand it, also draw attention to our similar teachings on the holiness and integrity of human sexuality. The climate of sexual permissiveness which is prevalent in some parts of the world stands in stark contrast to our teachings on the family and human sexuality. It further underscores with urgency the rights and responsibilities of parents for the moral and sexual education of the future generation. No government or no non-governmental agency outside the family should provide counsel or services to unmarried adolescents without the knowledge and express consent of their parents.

Our teachings are nuanced differently with regard to methods of family planning, but we agree that one goal of the divinely ordained marriage between a husband and wife is the creation of new life.

Development in connection with population growth is indeed the major focus of the Cairo Conference. We join all men and women of good will in stating our agreement that true development is based on meeting the needs of every human person and the common good. Muslims and Christians are committed to meeting the needs of the poor. The serious ecological questions and other issues regarding land use, efficient production and distribution of food, provide us with the opportunities to affirm our moral principles and to overcome the temptation of selfishness. Every human being has a right to participate fully in economic and social development. Everyone should have the opportunity for an education, and this is equally true for women and for male and female children. These rights and issues should be the primary points for engaging nations rather than means of population control.

The Conference on Development and Population focuses also on the equality of women in dignity and rights. The particular gifts of women, as teachers of the faith, bestowers of values, imparters of wisdom, leaders of projects and office holders, have sustained our two traditions from their origins. Development and expansion of the roles of women in society and the educational and health needs of women, which are insufficiently met across

the world, should be addressed by nations. Abuse and violence against women, whether individually or collectively, whether motivated by sinfulness or cultural biases, should be condemned and action taken for the eradication of abuse, violence and neglect of women and girls everywhere.

Discussion of population, consumption, and resources purely for demographic objectives too often leads to the imposition of standards and policies of some nations on other nations. As members of the two largest religious groups on earth embracing the human family extensively on every continent, in rich and poor nations alike, we are acutely aware of the need for arriving at universally accepted procedures and policies. Therefore, we plead that the language of the final text on the issues which are of critical concern to us be unambiguous and not open to opposing interpretations.

It is indeed critical to hear from religious communities because they provide moral and inspirational perspectives on these critical issues. Religion is very much a part of the lives of people in the United States and throughout the world providing sustenance and knowledge for addressing ultimate questions of meaning and the human condition. With ancient wisdom and extensive resources of knowledge and skills, religious communities are committed to meeting the profound needs of all and to respect for the earth.

We express together our concern about the crass labeling of the positions of Muslims on population and development issues as

"fundamentalist," implying they are extremists, when they indeed are speaking from the heart of their tradition. We also wish to note for the record that the Holy See has had diplomatic relations with countries with Muslim majorities, a practice which can be traced back even to ancient times. Full diplomatic relations with many "Islamic" nations have been on the public record for a long time.

We conclude by noting that there are threats of violence against those who will attend this important International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. We reiterate these sentences from our 1993 joint statement: "Aggression and terrorism wherever they occur are to be condemned since they constitute an illegitimate use of force and therefore violate the law of God. . . With equally strong resolve we reject any effort to claim a religious inspiration or sanction for such contemptible acts."