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COMMUNICATOR

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PHILIPPINES

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TELEPHONE: 58-48-28 • 59-76-41
59-41-76 • 59-76-14

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BUCHAREST!

- * The World Population Conference was a strange mixture of infuriating rhetoric, time-wasting procedural nonsense, hard-working back-stage compromise, occasional flashes of revealed truth, valuable human contact, sunshine and indignation — physical and mental.
- * *Over three million dollars were spent. A forest of paper was used up. The cynics had a field day.*
- * Yet in the end consensus emerged. The 136 government representatives went away with a Plan of Action, less specific than the draft document, but bringing the world nearer to two fundamental truths:
 - Population is an important factor in development.*
 - Women should be considered as equal partners with men.*
- * 1,200 delegates have been exposed to the conference. A good deal of ignorance has been cleared away.
- * Even John D. Rockefeller has joined the consensus position that population growth is not the primary source of the poverty, disease, illiteracy and gross inequality which characterizes the world.
- * *There is no conflict between voluntary population programs and the basic human right of individuals to determine their own fertility.*
- * The World Population Conference took place against an ominous background of world inflation and financial crisis.
- * *The recurrent emphasis on national sovereignty does not give great hope for international measures to meet the really urgent needs of people afflicted by poverty and famine.*
- * Unlike previous meetings of population experts in 1927, 1954 and 1965, the World Population Conference was a political gathering of government delegates from 136 nations.
- * It took place in Bucharest from August 19 through August 30, 1974. It was preceded by a youth conference, attended by 230 delegates, not all under the 30-year-old age limit.
- * Over 50 background papers were produced.
- * *The Secretary General was Antonio Carrillo-Flores — a Mexican diplomat, jurist, and scholar—who spent two years in preparing the conference, travelling around the world three times.*
- * Many third world and socialist governments were determined to rewrite the plan, to put less emphasis on the demographic approach and more on the need for social and economic development to combat poverty.
- * *On the last morning of the conference, only the Holy See refused to be associated with the consensus.*
- * The Population Tribune met in intensive discussion, with 1,400 participants! 80 papers were presented, and 40 films were shown!
- * A folk festival, a painting competition, and a model rural hospital were among the fringe activities.
- * *In the last days of the conference Rajeev Sethi staged an exhibition of Indian villagers—bringing attention back to where it belonged: the world's people.*

Father Arthur McCormack, Catholic priest, missionary and scholar—a former member of the Vatican Justice and Peace Commission, and special consultant to Mr. Carillo-Flores—gives this assessment of the conference:

* *The purpose of the Population Conference was to provide the population input for over-all United Nations strategy for socio-economic development and human welfare.*

* The conference was not meant to be taken in isolation. It should not be divorced from this master plan.

* The Draft World Population Plan of Action was variously decried at the Conference as an American document, a work of United Nations bureaucrats, a Malthusian fabrication with a purely demographic attitude.

* *It was none of these things.*

* The draft plan was the result of wide international discussion. It had been presented to five regional conferences in April and May of 1974.

* In the first week of the conference, a concerted attack on the plan was led by Argentina, with its 68 proposed amendments.

* The attack on the plan even went so far as to suppress inconvenient facts.

* *This is the 'Don't-tell-me-the-facts, they-stop-me-thinking' attitude, which is helpful in promoting a shaky theory, but hardly what one would expect in an international conference.*

* Argentina and Brazil are frankly, and not unreasonably, populationist. They have large tracts of land which are empty and capable of being developed.

* Some other Latin American countries were so convinced of the need for development, and for a new economic order, that they refused to consider population at all — or only in terms of development.

* *African countries were convinced—and quite plausibly—that their need was development, not population policies.*

* Strangest of all was China. Although for over a decade it has had an effective population policy, and — according to reports — a very effective family

planning program, it came out in extreme terms with an attack on the 'myth' of population explosion, expressing a confidence in the future that was wildly and unrealistically optimistic.

* A great deal of rhetoric and few facts supported the extreme developmentalism of some.

* *Some countries were far more influenced by ideological or political—e. g. anti-American—sentiments than by rational arguments.*

* One of the reasons for these attitudes was that delegations were led by politicians, some of whom had little expertise in population, and had not participated in the preparations for the conference.

* *The system of each nation having one vote was inappropriate at a population conference. An African country with half a million people had the same voting power as India with her 600 million.*

* In the background papers of the conference, 42 countries thought their populations were too high, and wished to reduce their rate of growth. This included large countries like India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh.

* *The majority at the conference was made up of small countries. It was, therefore, possible to get a completely distorted picture of world population approved by a majority.*

* Several speakers wanted to drive a stake into old Malthus. Anyone who gave the facts and numbers was labeled as Malthusian.

* The impression was given that developed countries—especially the United States—believe in aid to family planning rather than to development. This belies the fact.

* *The Asians led a counter-attack, to prevent the plan from being mutilated. They fought to have the views of two-thirds of the developing world adequately represented.*

* The position of India, in my opinion, was balanced and moderate.

* The extreme developmentalists aroused scepticism because they proposed complete development, social justice and a new economic order as a prerequisite for the success of population policies.

* Comparing the revised plan with the original draft plan, the losses seem to be in theoretical analysis, not in action.

* *The revised Plan of Action is a valuable set of guidelines for the whole world community.*

* The Population Conference was a great success in obtaining a consensus for this important statement.

* Two very important inter-related subjects were hardly touched in the Plan of Action: food and energy.

* *There was deafening silence about the consequences of the emergence of the oil-rich fourth world, and the possibly disastrous consequences of expensive oil to some developing countries.*

* In the spring there were embryonic signs of a genuine breaking down of barriers and a spirit of cooperation rather than confrontation. From this point of view, parts of the rhetoric of Bucharest represented a step backward.

* *It is to be hoped that the Food Conference will not repeat these mistakes!*

* * * * *

When Father Arthur McCormack was working in Rome, on the Justice and Peace Commission, he said, mournfully:

"You hear, sometimes, about the loneliness of the long distance runner. But this can not be compared to the loneliness of the population expert, in the Vatican.

* * * * *

Bucharest made strange bedfellows. Reaction against the Draft Plan of Action led the Africans to come in singing! They beat drums and chanted their desire for more children, more people, more life, more development, more aid for development, and less consumerism in the U.S.A. A few African countries, like Ghana, sang outside the chorus.

Latin America simply refused to admit that the problem of the world was population.

The advocates of women's liberation stormed through the streets with placards. The women were wearing little buttons, saying: "My body is mine!" They marched into the conference halls and took over the sessions, by sheer numbers, showing incredible energy. The male delegates looked at the women, and listened to them, in wild surmise—like stout Cortez upon a peak in Darien.

China came in fiercely against the draft plan — all teeth and claws. Of all the nations in the world, they probably have the most carefully elaborated population policy, despite their fiery anti-imperialistic rhetoric, which led them to denounce the whole conference as a capitalistic plot against the poor.

The Vatican brought in amendments to the draft plan. China brought in more amendments. The desperate working committee—hard-pressed and under siege, trying to give everyone a voice—brought out a combined document entitled:

Amendments proposed by the Republic of China and by the Vatican.

The delegates from China were furious! They refused to be associated with the delegates from the Vatican—even in a common protest. They demanded that the document be withdrawn, and destroyed.

It was. Hurriedly. At once, while the delegates were already in the hall.

Representatives of 136 nations waited for two hours while the poor secretaries in the mimeograph department turned out a new edition, in which the proposed amendments were printed separately.

At first blush, this looks like a bad omen for world peace.

But at least everyone said what he really thought. The delegates did not smile at each other, with their teeth.

The Africans danced and chanted; the women sang in the streets; the Chinese shouted in the conference halls; the Latin Americans had the great thrill of leading a revolution in Roumania, instead of in South America; the Vatican diplomats said their piece to the world, and stood their ground with dignity against 135 sovereign states; steam rose over Bucharest in great clouds.

And perhaps this is exactly what the world needed.

Dialogue!

* * * * *

* On the World Population Conference:

"It will be said that this conference met on the eve of the greatest famine in the world, and that the conference did not recognize this. It will be judged for this, by future generations."

* On the People's Tribune:

"The acoustics in this room were made in hell!"

—Doctor Margaret Mead

* On the formal panel sessions of the Tribune:

"Like first year university lectures. Hopeless for discussion or debate!"

—Michael White

"Hardly a scholar's meeting!"

—Population specialist

* When three papers lasting twenty minutes each were being delivered one after the other, they had to be very good to keep the audience from sleep or from the snack bars outside.

* In the second week fewer people were attending the panel sessions, and more were crowding into adjoining rooms for spontaneous discussion. The Tribune thus began to score good marks for spontaneity.

* Even John D. Rockefeller went to the rostrum and made obeisance towards social and economic development.

* Asian participants were genuinely surprised to find their simple assertion: *"We have a population problem!"* unacceptable to some African and Latin American colleagues.

* Three different types of meeting were struggling to make themselves felt:

The old-fashioned formal conference, with a set agenda, and the intention of reaching some specific conclusion.

The conference of specialists, presenting erudite papers to each other.

The conclave of activists, lobbyists and pressure groups—interested not in motions or in papers, but in ideas, for use in the field.

* Asia and Oceania had clearer targets for population growth than any other part of the world.

* Few countries in Latin America admitted to a population problem, and several wished to increase their numbers.

* The stand of Algeria:

"The population explosion is not the cause, but the result of under-development. It is no longer just a question of the third world stabilizing population. The developed world must put a brake on over-consumption!"

* The stand of Argentina:

"We want to increase our population, to aid development and progress. Instead of carrying out indiscriminate birth control programs, the world should increase its food producing capacity. The poor countries can not be expected to reduce their population growth so that the richer ones can maintain a higher standard of living!"

* The stand of the Philippines:

"We hope to reduce our population growth from 3.1% to 2.5%."

* The general stand of Africa:

"We want more people! Development, not birth control!"

* The stand of China:

"The most precious treasure in all the world is man!"

* A computer analysis of all the spoken and written words uttered at the conference would undoubtedly show that the word most frequently used was: *"development."*

* The second word most frequently used was: *"women."*

* By entirely different routes all came to the same conclusion: that the third world should not try to achieve development, or the dignity of woman, by emulating the methods of the first world.

Editor's note:

All of the comments on the world Population Conference, printed in this issue of The Communicator, are drawn from a special issue of: People, volume 1, number 5, 1974.

Next week we will present the highlights of the official World Plan of Action, and the unofficial final statement of the Tribune.

EDITOR:

Jamaa B. Reuter, S.J.

STAFF: Paul E. Sheehan, S.J. • Elizabeth Farley, R.S.C.J. • Aurelio Cortes, S.P.C.

Sarah Manapol, S.P.C. • Lucina Sarmiento, D.S.P. • Rosario Castro Aquino

Virginia M. Galdo • Nella R. Paculan • Isagani J. Diaz • Jaime Jamero