

Benin: The only population issue in Africa is underpopulation

by Dana S. Scanlon

The West African nation of Benin, and its President, Nicéphore Soglo, have taken the courageous lead internationally in fighting the malthusian agenda of the U.N. International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), slated to take place this September in Cairo, Egypt. In speeches before the U.N. Preparatory Commission and to a Washington press conference, Benin representatives have made the case that Africa's number one problem is not overpopulation, but underdevelopment and *underpopulation*.

Benin is not alone in insisting that population growth does not hinder development; on the contrary, the growth of population and its improvement in levels of education, training, and standard of living, are key components for enhancing the economic development of the nation. But the malthusian crowd running the ICPD agenda wants everyone to accept the idea that every child born, particularly in the developing sector, is a polluting parasite.

The Ivory Coast, Argentina, Malta, Nicaragua, Morocco, and Honduras are among those nations which, along with the Vatican, have bucked the ICPD agenda. The aggressive efforts mounted by those forces threw a monkey wrench into the building for the Cairo conference. The third and final Preparatory Committee (Prep Com) meeting for the ICPD, which finished up in late April at United Nations headquarters in New York, ended with no agreement on several elements of the draft program that is to be endorsed at Cairo.

Many Prep Com sessions were dominated by the debate over abortion between Vatican representative Msgr. Diarmuid Martin, on the one hand, and the pro-abortion lobby, which includes U.S. State Department Counselor Timothy Wirth. Several weeks ago, the State Department triggered an international outcry when it sent a cable to all U.S. diplomatic missions, urging them to pressure their host governments into backing abortion as an acceptable form of family planning.

The sacred role of the family

The Republic of Benin fired its opening shot on April 5, when its ambassador to the U.N., René Valéry Mongbé, addressed his fellow delegates in New York at the ICPD Prep Com meeting. He scored the "recipes" being promoted which "lead to the rejection of the conviction that man must be

placed at the center of development." The only "population" remedies envisaged by his country for its "population" problems, he declared, are "the struggle against illiteracy, the encouragement of production through the development of agriculture, forestry, cattle raising, fishing, etc." He insisted upon the "sacred" and "fundamental role of the family in education and in the maintenance of social cohesion."

Following the ambassador's speech, Pope John Paul II, as well as several pro-life members of U.S. Congress, sent messages of congratulations to Benin's President. President Nicéphore Dieudonné Soglo is a graduate of France's National School of Administration, who previously served his country as finance minister, and later prime minister from 1990-91. But in between those two ministerial posts, President Soglo put in many years of service in Washington, battling for the interests of the developing sector inside the World Bank.

President Soglo returned to Washington on May 4, for meetings with U.S. officials and to give the keynote presentation at the International Fund for Agricultural Development workshop on Land Degradation and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. At a press conference following that, President Soglo called "shameful" the efforts of the zero-growth lobby to impose abortion and other forms of population control on Africa—whose population density is among the lowest in the world.

In response to a series of questions from this reporter concerning the ICPD conference, and the efforts of numerous well-financed non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to spread the myth of Africa as "overpopulated" and to insist that the Cairo conference promote abortion, President Soglo was unequivocal:

"My viewpoint on that is very clear. From the beginning, when I was executive director in the World Bank. . . . I used to say that no one from Germany can go to Israel and tell the people: You are too many people in a small country. They would be kicked out immediately!

"The issue of the family for us, is something sacred, you have to preserve that. In Africa, the problem of development is *underpopulation*, the issue is not overpopulation. Take a country like Zaire, a country whose size is half of western

Europe: in western Europe the population is 700 million; Zaire's population is 35 million. They have everything. They have different kinds of climates. They can grow everything from palm nuts to strawberries. They have the second-largest river in the world, so they could have cheap energy. It has been called a geological scandal, because they have every kind of mining. The problem they have in developing wealth is first, to have a population to work in their country, and also to have people with skills. Manpower is a major issue, because the development issue is not to have all this wealth, it is to have people to work properly."

Harking back to his days at the World Bank, he added, "When there was the Third Report on Sub-Saharan Africa, they wanted to put as a conditionality, this issue of population, and I was very blunt on that. . . . I remember in the 1960s, you had the Club of Rome, the idea of zero growth. And they also don't like life. . . . We are not going to accept any kind of conditionality on this matter. They can make noise."

It is a matter of development

President Soglo spoke about a trip to the Netherlands some years ago, where "they started talking about that to me. I went to the house of a member of Parliament, and they started talking. I said: You take a small country like this, it is less than one department in my country; you have 14 million people living well. It is not a matter of population, it is a matter of development. That is the real issue."

The President of Benin spoke with great passion about his conviction that Africa can develop and that Africans, if given the same opportunities, are as capable of development as anyone. "The brain is like a muscle," he said, meaning you must use it for it to develop and grow. Taking a swipe at the theories of the eugenics crowd, who are among the leaders of the pack who believe in treating the world's population like cattle, like a herd that needs to be culled, he insisted that "there is no genetic defect which prevents a person from moving forward," only the lack of education, training, and opportunity.

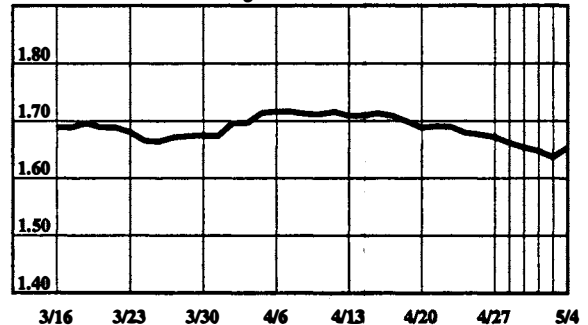
President Soglo is currently taking his turn as the West African head of state chairing the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas), and at his May 4 press conference he made some startling revelations concerning the role of certain NGOs in the civil war-torn West African nation of Liberia where Ecowas had been trying to mediate between the warring parties. In Liberia, "you have some organizations, humanitarian ones, doing a good job. You have some that are only there to raise money. If you don't have war, they have to retire. So, I have called them, and said: No, if this is your purpose, stop it!"

President Soglo convincingly made the case that just as Asian countries from Vietnam to Korea were ravaged by war decades ago, but now are developing economically, so can Africa overcome the tragedies of Somalia, Rwanda, and Liberia, if given serious investment and assistance.

Currency Rates

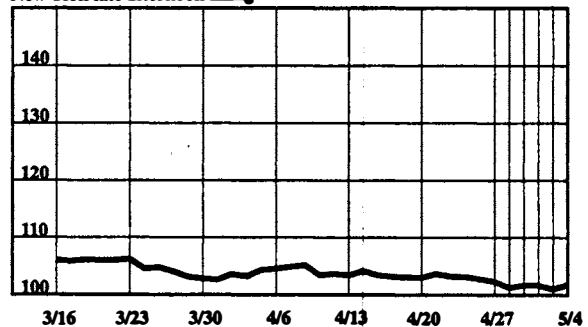
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



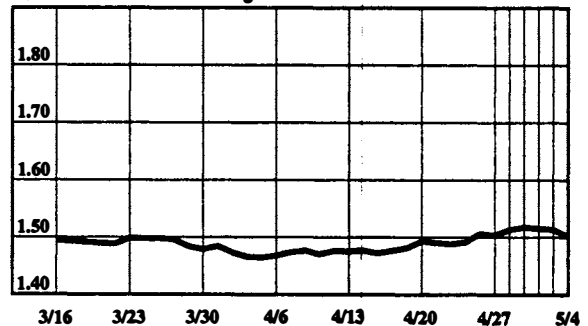
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

