

## The Muslim view on population control

"No good Muslim will ever accept any human directive which contravenes the laws of Allah." So begins a response to a national population control program adopted by the Nigerian military government in 1988 under pressure from aid donors and the World Bank.

The writer, Alhaji Usman Faruk, one-time governor of North Western State (now divided into Sokoto and Niger states), is a highly respected religious leader. His response to the population program was published in April of 1988 as a booklet, *Family Planning: The Islamic Viewpoint*, by the Nationhouse Press.

Noting that the government's new population policy is likely to "lead the entire country into unpardonable regret," Faruk discusses the divinely ordained balance between male and female and between human numbers and resources. "Man in his limited knowledge and wisdom always concentrates on the number of mouths to feed and the resources that are immediately available without taking into consideration some hidden factors that also control life and means," he writes. "But God, on the other hand, being the Creator of all and Master of all, cannot be said to be taken unawares of certain developments. . . . In other words, the Islamic stand is that whatever our numbers are, it is easy for Allah to provide for all in His own Divine way."

Faruk offers the example of Saudi Arabia, whose

economy at one time depended on meager funds derived from pilgrimages and local trade. "However, when the population of Saudi Arabia started growing rapidly so as to outpace the available food, God, in His usual mercy and mysterious ways, caused the discovery of petrol—in such quantity that has made it possible to support a population more than a hundred times the past population of Saudi Arabia."

The booklet also foresees devastating implications for morality and family life, leading Muslim societies to imitate "the cursed and debased societies of Europe and America." The widespread promotion of anti-pregnancy drugs and devices, Faruk adds, will lead to "an earthquake of moral laxity."

### 'We are not sheep'

The author raises some pertinent points for leaders of countries tempted to cave into external pressures for family planning. "The government," he insists, does not own the Nigerian people and therefore "cannot say they will reduce us or increase us like we are houses." Nor has the national leadership even revealed "how many Nigerians she wants to reduce even if Nigerians agree to be treated as sheep," Faruk writes. Furthermore, the country's rulers do not "know what will be the balance of her citizens after it has effected the so-called reduction" or "the extent of the country's resources" needed to sustain the population.

But Faruk is most adamant in his attacks on the West for its aggressive pursuit of population control. He notes that similar programs in Egypt led to the sterilization of

programs identified the Futures Group as "a private organization concerned with policy analysis, development, and strategic planning," which works in "support of the analytical activities of several agencies."<sup>29</sup>

● Although not directly involved in the Nigerian fake document hoax, Johns Hopkins University, developer of psychological warfare manuals for U.S. military use, also conducts an "Islam and Family Planning" propaganda campaign in Nigeria. The project, which has received tens of millions of dollars from USAID's Nigeria mission since its inception in 1988, is intended to produce and distribute tens of thousands of newspaper articles, radio and television programs, dramas and announcements, commercial and educational films, music recordings, traditional entertainment, posters and booklets, special magazine inserts, and other propaganda for distribution throughout Nigeria in a variety of local languages. Among the specific aims of its so-called "population communication services" campaign is the production of five-minute testimonials from religious leaders for broadcast in appropriate regions of the country, outreach campaigns for

opinion leaders, and the preparation of "special materials addressed to specific groups," including promotional literature on "Islam and family planning." According to a written project authorization, the goal of the activity is to create "a broad political and social constituency supportive of family planning policies and programs" and to achieve "significant attitudinal changes favoring smaller family norms."<sup>30</sup>

● Still another USAID proxy contributing funds to the Omran scheme was the Pathfinder Fund, based near Boston, Massachusetts. According to a guide to population activities produced yearly by the United Nations, the Pathfinder project consisted of an effort to "revise source documents on Islam and family planning for theologians and teachers," as well as an endeavor to promote family planning among Islamic leaders, "to develop 'prototype' concepts and project designs in support of Islam and population policy development," and to locate "new materials needed from particularly Islamic leaders on certain topics for further use."<sup>31</sup>

Like most U.S.-based population groups, Pathfinder has a sordid history. It was organized in the late 1920s by the

both women and men, while, at the same time, "the Europeans who were controlling and funding the scheme . . . handed over an opposite scheme for the Israelis," dispensing propaganda and financial incentives to bring about higher birthrates with the intent of seeing the Jewish population surpass that of the Arabs.

"Therefore, I have a strong suspicion that Nigeria's position within the African continent has well qualified her for the same treachery hatched and unleashed on Arabs 35 years ago."

Faruk concludes: "One of the measures to halt Nigeria's rise to super power level is therefore through orchestrated family planning and birth control. Every known trick and deceit has been wrapped up in the scheme."

### 'Against the law of nature'

A more recent text, *Islam and Child Spacing*, by Ibrahim N. Sada, arrives at the same conclusion. The author, who heads the Department of Islamic Law at Ahmadu Bello University, explains the traditional Muslim rejection of birth control in these words: "Islam is regarded by the Muslim as a natural way of life. All its rules for the individual as well as for the general public are based on the fundamental principle that man should behave and act in consonance with the natural laws working in the universe and that he must refrain from any course of life that may force him to deviate from the purpose for which Allah created him."

Moreover, "the greatest reward Allah gives a person for his commitment to God, right in this world, is to give him various children. If one were to look at all the famous

and known families in this country, it will be found that they are strong and famous not on account of their money or power but on account of their large number. If this is true of individual families, what more of a nation? This is why the Prophet clearly stressed that Muslims should marry and generate for He will be proud of their large number in the last day."

Like Faruk, Sada raises questions about the motives and morals of foreign peoples who propose birth control for the Islamic world. The booklet includes several quotes from early twentieth-century authors in the West who feared the rise of the dark races as the fertility of Europeans began its downward trend, and it contends that Islam is entirely incompatible with the western lifestyle.

His commentary ends with a plea to Nigerians: "We must use all available means to fight the trend if only to save our country from imperialist machinations to destroy it. . . . We must be left alone to decide our own interests and shape our destiny in line with our socio-cultural and religious values."

Similar views have come from other scholars in Nigeria and throughout the Muslim world.

"Artificial birth control is rebellion against the law of nature," said Dr. Aliu O. Akano of the Islamic Medical Association at a conference on population control in the Nigerian city of Ibadan. "It is against the very nature of man to interfere with procreation. Therefore, what needs to be changed is not the natural mode of behavior but man's whims and tendencies which induce him to resort to easy courses and a life of pleasure without responsibility. To do otherwise is a sure way to destruction."

eccentric soap-fortune heir Clarence Gamble to promote "race betterment" in the United States.<sup>32</sup> More recently, it has been involved in a series of activities that could fairly be described as sabotage. The most recent edition of the U.N.'s population project directory, for example, lists a series of "three-day orientation seminars on population and family planning" that were conducted in Indonesia by Pathfinder for "120 religious leaders representing 70 conservative Islamic religious schools toward a goal of motivating them to become active supporters of the family planning movement."<sup>33</sup> In Bangladesh, Pathfinder is accountable for an "Islam and Family Planning" project in which 20 publications addressing ideas about birth control are to be prepared and distributed, as well as another activity that involves staging "receptions to honor two-child couples" and otherwise to "promote the two-child family as a social norm" and stress the health benefits of birth control—"all within the context of Islam."<sup>34</sup> In Gambia, the Pathfinder fund operates a "male motivation project" and a campaign to recruit and train "peer counsellors" to breach cultural inhibitions against using birth

control.<sup>35</sup>

• A Nov. 14, 1986 memorandum to Pathfinder included a draft action plan for circulation of the Omran text which revealed that the program was intended to counter an inclination on the part of Nigeria's Muslims "to be especially conservative and traditional" about matters involving human procreation. The draft included this warning: "Any tendency toward politicization in this matter might have serious effects." This cover memo was written by Moye W. Freymann and Linda Lacy of the Carolina Population Center in Chapel Hill, North Carolina,<sup>36</sup> another major actor in the effort to curb birthrates in the South. Under contract with USAID, the center drew up the plans for a \$100 million population program in Nigeria which was inaugurated in 1987 and is widely credited with having brought about a reversal of Nigeria's pro-natalist public policy the following year.<sup>37</sup>

According to a computer database of USAID population activities, the center is also active in the design and evaluation of population control activities in several other countries, including Indonesia, Egypt, and Jordan.<sup>38</sup>