

April 17, 2007

DPI – NGO BRIEFING ON  
POPE BENEDICTS VISIT TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Thursday, April 10, 2008, 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Background Information:

Pope Benedict XVI is the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church and Sovereign of the Vatican City State. On April 18, he will visit the United Nations. This will be the fourth time a Pope has visited the Organization's Headquarters in New York. On this occasion today, a panel discussion was held and looked into the significance of Pope Benedict's visit and its impact on global issues.

Moderator:

Juan Carlos Brandt; Chief, DPI/NGO

Speakers:

H.E. Archbishop Celestino Migliore; apostolic Nuncio, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations

Mr. Peter Steinfels, Co-Director, Fordham University Center on Religion and Culture

Sister Dorothy Farley, Executive Director, International Catholic Organizations/ Information Center at the United Nations

1. The moderator, Juan Carlos Brandt, welcomed everyone and introduced each of the speakers with their backgrounds.

2. The first speaker, H.E. Archbishop Migliore, outlined the previous three Papal visits to the United Nations; in 1965 by Pope Paul VI on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, in 1979 by Pope John Paul II and again in 1995 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations.

Archbishop Migliore drew a parallel between the roles of both the United Nations and the Vatican as moral leaders. He said that during the Pope's visit, he was expected to talk about peace. But due time constraints, the Pope was not likely to speak about any particular world crises, but he will recognize the value of human life.

Archbishop Migliore stressed the importance to respect human dignity and to identify human rights as non-negotiable and undeniable all over the world. He said that human dignity should be the common denominator that ties together all cultures of the world.

The Archbishop recognized the anticipation of Pope Benedict's visit and the message he will deliver. He stated that the priority of the Pope was to create a dialogue between people of different cultures and interactions between world leaders with different beliefs.

3. The second speaker, Mr. Peter Steinfels, began by analyzing Catholicism in the United States. He noted that 75 percent of Americans had a favorable view of Pope Benedict and most Americans were eager to learn more. He indicated that some public opinion poles state that 3 out of 10 Americans did not know enough about Pope Benedict to comment.

Mr. Steinfels stated that only two thirds of Americans, who were born and raised Catholic still identified with the religion. However he stated that the number of Catholics in the United States continues to grow due to the influx of Catholic Immigrants. He felt that the Pope's visit would promote the understanding that the Catholic Church was global. He further stated that that the Pope would not get involved with local politics. Mr. Steinfels concluded by discussing the decrease of Catholic priests worldwide.

4. The last speaker, Sister Dorothy Farley, noted the value of her organization. They are not limited to only official United Nations documents and conferences but includes the sharing of their experiences with constituents from grassroots communities around the world. She cited a fellow Sister's work in South Africa noting how United Nations documents gave her work international credibility.

Sister Farley discussed ways in which her Organization extended their resources to other organizations, such as Catholic International Education Associations, as well as schools, churches and other outlets of civil society.

She further stated that stated that they also reach United Nations bodies in Paris, Geneva, and other areas including WTO and ILO. She also mentioned other outreach programs such as internships that they reach. She concluded by stressing the importance of the Pope's physical presence at the United Nations on April 18.

5. Questions/Answers:

5.1 Archbishop Migliore; In answer to a question on whether Pope Benedict would address the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), he stated that the MDGs coincided with the Gospel

5.2 Sister Farley; In answer to the same question, she added that the Pope would indirectly address the MDGs when he discussed AIDs, poverty, or any other elements of the MDG agenda.

5.3 Archbishop Migliore; In response to a question on the decreasing number of Catholics throughout the world, he stated that this was a complex issue and expressed the hope for the Pope nature the development of new young groups of Catholics

5.4 Archbishop Migliore; In response to a question on religious diversity the Archbishop cited Pope Benedict's work in which he recognized that truth existed in other religion. He further stated that religious freedom was a basic human right and should be protected by governments.

5.5 Mr Steinfels; He recognized the Pope's visit as a demonstration of the validity and the importance of international institutions.

5.6 Mr. Steinfels; He noted that the movement for dignity and equality of women was supported by the church.

5.7 Archbishop Migliore; In response to a question on why the Pope was not visiting Boston where most of the sex scandal cases involving the Church had taken place, he responded that enough was enough and that the visit should be viewed in a positive way.

5.8 Sister Farley; In response to a question noted that women deserved recognition and that women wanted to be at the table which was partly why she accepted the invitation to speak at this briefing.

6. The briefing was attended by about 200 representatives of NGOs, United Nations and Permanent Mission Staff. Several media covered the event that included Reuters, AP, CNN, Washington Times, SABC, ARD, Saudi Press Agency and others.

Page 4

PDC George Weinstein  
National UN Chairman