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## **Response to the UN's Claim of Access to Contraception as a Basic Human Right**

The Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction, Omaha, Nebraska offers the following critique of some of the principal claims and conclusions set down in the 2012 Annual Report of the United Nations Population Fund (released 11.14.12):

- First, because we concur with Article 16 of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: all “men and women of full age, . . . , have the right to marry and to found a family,” we also believe couples have the right, by logical extension, to *responsibly* plan their family [also promoted in the 2012 U.N. Annual Report]. We differ, however, with the Report’s definition of *responsible* family planning. To responsibly plan a family means that married couples should have the right to voluntarily access a means to space their children that is not only reliable *but also* moral, that is, one that promotes genuine human fulfillment for the couple, their family, and the society. We also disagree with Annual Report’s conclusion conflating the universal human right of “access to family planning” with “access to contraception,” ostensibly doing so on grounds that contraception is the *only* or *only* “*reliable and high quality*” means of planning a family. Hence, access to family planning through competent education on human fertility is a universal human right, but access to contraception is not.
- Second, we understand how contraception can appear to empower women by providing them a way to space children so that they can more easily work outside the home and increase family income. However, thousands of couples using the Creighton Model FertilityCare System (CrMS), testify that this natural system of regulating fertility provides an even *better* way to empower a woman. It provides her with a) woman-specific biofeedback—on any given day in any given cycle—about her body and her fertility; b) a means of treating OB/Gyn abnormalities such as unusual bleeding, premenstrual syndrome and infertility, c) an effective means of avoiding or achieving a pregnancy, and d) a basis for healthy communication between her and her husband about family planning goals.

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- Third, we reject the Report’s allegation that contraceptive use improves the user’s health. Our 40+ years of clinical data show the exact opposite: oral contraceptives (OCs) have a devastating potential to compromise a woman’s reproductive and overall health. Echoing our results, the World Health Organization not only classifies the OC as a carcinogen but warnings from package inserts of many OCs also specify that the pill “may *increase* risk of breast cancer and cancer of the reproductive organs.” Take the claim that the OC lowers the risk of ovarian cancer. Again, what women need to know are the *specific* risks and benefits of the pill. For example, compared to a woman not using hormonal contraception, it is true that the woman who uses the combined OC for five years incurs the benefit of a 40% decreased ovarian cancer mortality risk. But here’s the tradeoff: the same woman faces *increased risks* from the use of that same OC over the same 5-year period—a 100% increased risk for venous thromboembolism, a 24% increased risk of breast cancer, and at least a 100% increased risk of myocardial infarction.

Furthermore, women who use OCs experience many (and sometimes debilitating) side effects from the Pill: bloating, breast tenderness, headaches, irregular bleeding, mood changes, and nausea.

- Fourth, our secondary research data contradict the Report’s claim that increased access to contraception limits abortions. For example, the November 2006 issue of *Obstetrics and Gynecology* reported, based on data from 23 studies, that greater access to emergency contraception *increased* rather than decreased the incidence of unintended pregnancy and abortion rates. The sad truth, then, is that the surge in contraceptive use has resulted in more unplanned pregnancies which, in turn, have resulted not only in the increased backup-contraceptive-choice of abortion, but also in devastating post-abortion psychological sequelae.
- Fifth, we agree that spacing children allows mothers to secure employment outside the home, thereby contributing to economic prosperity for family and country. Nonetheless, improved economic productivity should never be secured at the expense of the view that children are a country’s greatest resource.
- Sixth, we object to the Annual Report’s silence on the need for conception of children within the context of a mutual permanent commitment on the parents. Children have the absolute right to be conceived, gestated, born into, and raised within marriage.