

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09VATICAN119</a>	<a href="#">2009-11-19 15:03</a>	<a href="#">2010-12-19 12:12</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Vatican</a>

VZCZCXRO2847

PP RUEHBZ RUEHDBU RUEH DU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHMR RUEHNP RUEHPA

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DE RUEHROV #0119/01 3231533

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FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1190

INFO RUEHRN/USMISSION UN ROME PRIORITY 0007

RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC

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RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE

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RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 1229

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000119

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2034

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VT

SUBJECT: POPE TURNS UP THE HEAT ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

REF: A. A) VATICAN 104

[B](#). B) VATICAN 96

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CLASSIFIED BY: Rafael Foley, Pol Chief.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#). (SBU) Summary: Pope Benedict addressed the opening of the World Food Summit urging leaders to care for the world's hungry and protect the environment. Similarly, at the UN General

Assembly, the Vatican nuncio stressed the need for a comprehensive international energy policy that protects the environment and limits climate change. Meanwhile Vatican officials remain largely supportive of genetically modified crops as a vehicle for protecting the environment while feeding the hungry, but -- at least for now -- are unwilling to challenge bishops who disagree. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In remarks at the opening of the World Food Security Summit in Rome on November 16th, Pope Benedict devoted over one third of his speech to the link between food security and environmental degradation. The Pope stressed that states have an obligation to future generations to reduce environmental degradation. Citing the probable link between environmental destruction and climate change, he stated that protecting the environment requires "change in the lifestyles of individuals and communities, in habits of consumption and in perceptions of what is genuinely needed." Benedict urged the international community to promote development while safeguarding the planet.

¶3. (SBU) The Pope also stated that access to "sufficient, healthy and nutritious" food is a fundamental right upheld by the Catholic Church. Linking development with use of agricultural technologies (i.e., biotechnologies), Benedict stressed good governance and further infrastructure development as essential to increasing food security over the long-term. (Note: Benedict's mention of agricultural technologies is a small but significant step towards more vocal Vatican support of biotechnologies. End Note)

¶4. (C) In a separate meeting November 11, Poloff spoke with

Monsignor James Reinert, the point person on food security and biotechnology at the Vatican's Council of Justice and Peace - a Vatican think tank on social issues . Reinert said the Vatican agrees that countries must be empowered to increase domestic agricultural production and that genetically modified crops (GMOs) have a role in this process, but not everybody in the Church is comfortable with them. The Vatican cannot force all bishops to endorse biotechnology, he said, particularly if their opposition has to do with concerns over protecting profits of large corporations who hold the patents for the crops, versus feeding the hungry. In the Philippines, he noted, bishops strongly protested GMOs in the past. (Note: South African Cardinal Wilfrid Fox Napier's November 16 comments to a news agency that "Africans do not need GMOs, but water" is another example of specific Church leaders skeptical about the potential benefits of new biotechnologies. End note.).

¶5. (U) Comment: The Vatican is publicly stressing in various fora the need to care for the environment in the run-up to the Copenhagen Climate Change Summit. Pope Benedict places caring for the environment ("the creation") as a central social, economic and moral issue to his papacy. The Pope's proposal to curb environmental degradation is for people everywhere to reject excessive materialism and consumerism. In the Vatican's view, unsustainable lifestyles in developed countries--and not population growth worldwide--is to blame for global warming. Vatican officials claim that the planet has the capacity to feed and sustain its expanding population, provided resources are properly distributed and waste controlled. Until recently, Vatican officials often noted that the countries that released most of the greenhouse gases were not the world's most populous. As China and India industrialize and release more greenhouse gases, however, the Vatican may find it more difficult to blame climate change on lifestyles only. Even as this happens, however, the Vatican will continue to oppose aggressive

population control measures to fight hunger or global warming.

¶6. (SBU) While the Vatican's message on caring for the environment is loud and clear, its message on biotechnologies is still low-profile (ref. b). Quietly supportive, the Church considers the choice of whether to embrace GMOs as a technical decision for farmers and governments. The Vatican's own

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scientific academy has stated that there is no evidence GMOs are harmful, and that they could indeed be part of addressing global food security. However, when individual Church leaders, for ideological reasons or ignorance, speak out against GMOs, the Vatican does not -- at least not yet -- feel that it is its duty to challenge them. Post will continue to lobby the Vatican to speak up in favor of GMOs, in the hope that a louder voice in Rome will encourage individual Church leaders elsewhere to reconsider their critical views. End Comment.

DIAZ