

To Sterilize Millions

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The United States is seeking to provide the means by which one quarter of the fertile women in the world can be sterilized, the director of the Federal Government's Office of Population said here yesterday.

As many as 100,000,000 women around the world might be sterilized if U.S. goals are met, Dr. R. T. Ravenholt, the director, said.

One of the programs that the U.S. is using in trying to reach this goal, Dr. Ravenholt said, is a federally financed training program for foreign doctors at Washington University Medical School. The main purpose of the program is to train doctors in "advanced fertility management techniques," including sterilization, Dr. Ravenholt said.

Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore also participates in the program, called PIEGO (Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics).

Dr. Ravenholt made his remarks during an interview at the Chase-Park Plaza Hotel. He was in St. Louis to attend the annual meeting of the Population Association of America.

Dr. Ravenholt listed four reasons, including the protection of U.S. economic interests, why the U.S. should lead world population control efforts.

First, he said, a decline in the growth rate in poor countries will increase those nations's standard of living. "Resources divided by population equals well being," Dr. Ravenholt. "We're trying to lower the denominator in that equation."

Second, the U.S. has a "moral responsibility to take leadership" because it was largely American medical advances which created the population explosion by lowering the world's death rate. "We will be in a reprehensible position unless we help these poor countries balance their births and deaths," he said.

Third, population control is needed to maintain "the normal operation of U.S. commercial interests around the world:" "Without out trying to help these countries with their economic and social development, the world would rebel against the strong U.S. commercial presence," he said. "The self-interest thing is a compelling element."

Fourth, continuation of the population explosion would result in such terrible socio-economic condition abroad that revolutions would result. These revolutions could be harmful to the U.S., Dr. Ravenholt, suggested.

Dr. Ravenholt made his comments about sterilizing one quarter of the world's fertile women in the following context. Where sterilization services are readily available, about one quarter of the fertile women who are living with men tend to take advantage of them. He cited the U.S. and India as countries

where this pattern has been noted.

If sterilization services were made readily available world-wide, he said, then about one quarter of the world's approximately 570,000,000 fertile women living with men would accept sterilization, he suggested.

Dr. Ravenholt expressed concern about criticism leveled at PIEGO during the last year by a small group of Washington University students, faculty and staff members. The group has attacked PIEGO on political grounds and has called for Washington University to its involvement in the program.

Among the critics are: Garland Allen, associate professor of biology; Miriam Golomb, a post-doctoral fellow in bio-

chemistry, and Andrew Goodman, a second year medical student.

The critics have contended that the best way to improve the standard of living in poor countries is to promote economic development and a more equitable division of resources.

In fact, the critics say, there would be no overpopulation problem if food and resources were distributed more equally. The critics say that Cuba was considered "overpopulated" until the Castro revolution there; then the economy was reorganized and more workers — more people — were needed.

The critics say they don't oppose

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sterilization, but that they think it should not be spearheaded by the U.S. for reasons of U.S. self-interest.

The true motive of the U.S. program, they contend, is to protect the status quo and forestall revolutions which promote socio-economic equality.

Dr. Ravenholt called the critics "a really radical extremist group lashing out at a responsible program." He said he thought the critics wanted to see the world situation deteriorate further "so that revolution will occur."

However, Dr. Ravenholt gave credence to one of the arguments made by the critics — that PIEGO is basically a training program in female sterilization.

Washington University officials have denied this. Last year, Dr. Arpad I. Csapo, co-director of the PIEGO program here, told the Post-Dispatch that the study of sterilization was only a minor part of the program. Dr. William H. Danforth, chancellor of the university, characterized the program as a broad brush-up course in newer gynecological-obstetrical techniques.

Asked directly if female sterilization training was the main goal of the program, Dr. Ravenholt said that the main purpose was to train doctors in "advance techniques of fertility management," and went on to say that "surgical sterilization has become increasingly important in recent years" as one of those techniques.

PIEGO is one of several programs sponsored by the U.S. Office of Population to control growth abroad, Dr. Ravenholt said. The Office of Population is part of the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), an arm of the Department of State.

About 30 countries have bilateral agreements with the U.S. Government to provide population control programs, Dr. Ravenholt said. "This is our preferred route," he commented.

In some countries, however, "political sensitivity" makes it impossible for the U.S. to negotiate such agreements. In

those cases, he said, efforts are made to set up population programs under the aegis of other organizations, such as the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and the International Planned Parenthood Federation. Both groups receive heavy U.S. funding, he said.

In countries where there is opposition to U.S. involvement in population affairs, the opposition generally comes from leftist or religious elements or both, Dr. Ravenholt said.

In the six years since PIEGO was created, Dr. Ravenholt said, more than 500 doctors from about 60 countries have been trained. He said the program operates on a yearly budget of up to \$5,000,000.

Dr. James C. Warren, co-director of the PIEGO program at Washington University, recently told the Post-Dispatch that about 70 foreign doctors are being trained at the university this year. Altogether, more than 200 students have been enrolled here since 1973, he said. Critics of the program have documents which they say show that PIEGO will have paid Washington University \$2,666,797 for its services by the end of 1977. Dr. Ravenholt acknowledged yesterday that some of the doctors trained in PIEGO come from nations like Chile and Iran where human rights mean little, and where forced sterilizations were a theoretical possibility. He said that Indian doctors had been trained in the program, but that most of the forced sterilizations that recently took place there had been performed on men, a form of sterilization not taught in PIEGO.

He added that PIEGO strongly emphasizes that the sterilizations should be voluntary. "This doesn't provide an absolute guarantee that someone won't abuse the purpose," he conceded.

Critics of the program say they are worried about the threat of forced sterilizations in many of the countries from which PIEGO participants come.