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BELEM, PARA, BRAZIL

Memorandum of Conversation

SUBJECT: Military Officers' Views on Population Control

PARTICIPANTES: Captain Raphael de Azevedo BRANCO, Commander of Salvador and Aratu Naval Bases

Colonel Alvaro Alfredo Alvarenga ELY, Commander of the Bahian Military Police

Alexander F. Watson, American Consul

PLACE and TIME: Home of a mutual friend in Salvador, August 14, 1970

Without any solicitation on the part of the reporting officer these two influential military officers energetically described their firm belief that, in order for Brazil to progress from underdeveloped status, she would have to deal rationally with the serious problem of excess population growth. They cited statistics indicating how rapid Brazil's economic and social development would be if the population growth rate was reduced to zero. They bemoaned the fate of their enlisted men and less well paid officers who were burdened with far more children than they could adequately feed, clothe or educate. They criticized what they considered to be the hypocritical attitude of some middle and upper class opponents of population control who allow and even encourage their wives to use contraceptive devices while denying the poor access to such devices or even the knowledge that such devices exist.

Colonel Ely went so far as to state that, even though he had no authorization to do so, he was going to make birth control information and even pills available to his men soon.

Comment: This is the first time the reporting officer has heard such views expressed in such detail and with such conviction by military officers, but if there are many other high level officers who share the views expressed by Captain Branco and Colonel Ely, they may constitute a powerful lobby in favor of breaking down traditional Brazilian taboos about birth control and developing a rational population policy. It is interesting to note that the views of the Church were given no consideration whatsoever.

POL:AFWatson:afw

Clearance: Embassy RIO/POL