

Bishops Protest Reagan Military Aid Plan

Washington (NC) — President Reagan's proposals for increased military aid to Central America hold the diplomatic process hostage and delay peace in the region, said a statement from the U.S. Catholic Conference.

The statement, issued by Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, USCC president, said that the "single acceptable way to achieve peace and build justice" in Central America "lies along the route of dialogue and negotiations."

The USCC is the public policy arm of the U.S. bishops.

Reagan announced Feb. 3 that he would ask Congress to increase military and economic aid to Central America by more than \$3 billion, including \$1.05 billion to El Salvador in the next two years.

The Reagan proposals are based on recommendations of the Jan. 11 report by the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, which urged the president to retain a strong military stance in the region and increase both economic and military aid.

Bishop Malone's statement, released Feb. 8 in Washington, said that "no matter how conditioned on human rights progress such (military) aid may be, we must protest in strongest terms this further militarization of our policy, holding diplomacy hostage and delaying the longed-for peace."

"The task," he said, "is not to win the war but to win the peace."

By supporting increased military aid, Bishop Malone said, the commission, headed by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, did not accept the view of the bishops of El Salvador nor of the U.S. bishops.

"Still less" has the administration accepted those views in its call for increased military aid, he added.

Bishop Malone pointed out that in a 1981 statement on Central America, the U.S. bishops expressed their overall opposition to U.S. emphasis on military aid to the region.

After several U.S. bishops visited Central America in 1983, they testified before a congressional committee, Bishop Malone said, and the conference "muted its longstanding opposition to all U.S. military aid to El Salvador in favor of pressing more urgently than ever the route of dialogue and negotiations."

The bishop also said that in a meeting with members of the Kissinger Commission, Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez of San Salvador said the church in El Salvador speaks "clearly in favor of a political solution to our conflict and continues

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to insist that this war which pits brother against brother be humanized, reduced and ended as quickly as possible."

The USCC recognizes the international dimension of the Salvadoran conflict, Bishop Malone said, and accepts "the view that a precipitous cut-off of all U.S. support could result in even more chaotic bloodletting."

However, he said, the USCC urges "the gradual diminution of military support and a much more force-

ful effort on the diplomatic and political fronts.

"The core problem, stripped of all that has been added to it in recent years," Bishop Malone said, "is endemic social inequity and brutal military repression that has long characterized Salvadoran society."

"There cannot be authentic peace, which is the fruit of justice, until the tyranny of social discrimination and political repression is ended," he said.

Sandinist Priests Warned to Leave Government

By John Thavis

Rome (NC) — Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega, president of the Nicaraguan Bishops Conference, has criticized priests active in the country's Sandinista government and has warned that the Church is ready to apply sanctions if they do not leave their positions.

The priests "are more in love with the political ministry than with the priestly ministry," he said.

Bishop Vega, head of the prelature of Juigalpa, Nicaragua, spoke in an interview published in the Feb. 2 issue of the Italian Catholic magazine, 30 Days. He did not say what sanctions would be applied.

The bishop, who became conference president in 1983, referred to an agreement in 1981 between four office-holding priests and the Nicaraguan Bishops Conference after the bishops had warned the priests that they faced Church sanctions if they did not leave their posts.

Under the accord, the priests agreed not to publicly exercise their ministry while holding office and pledged that they "will not invoke or use their conditions as priests to help justify state or party functions and actions."

The accord covers Maryknoll Father Miguel D'Escoto, foreign minister; Father Ernesto Cardenal, cultural minister; Jesuit Father Fernando Cardenal, director of the Sandinista Youth Movement; and Father Edgar Parrales, ambassador to the Organization of American States.

Another prominent priest in public office is Jesuit Father Alvaro Arguello, a member of the Council of State, a legislative advisory body. He was not covered in the agreement because he was elected by the Nicaraguan clergy to represent them in the council. Since then, Church officials have said that he should also resign.

"There was an agreement made to give interested

priests a way to review their positions," Bishop Vega said. "But with the passage of time it appears that they are more in love with the political ministry than with the priestly ministry."

"Today, I don't know how many of them are willing to accept the dictates of the new canon law," he said. "There has not yet been an official pronouncement, but if nothing changes we will have to apply the code, and they know this."

Canon 285 of the new Code of Canon Law, which went into effect in November, says that clerics are forbidden to assume public office when this involves sharing in the exercise of civil power. Unlike the previous code, the new code does not explicitly allow bishops or religious superiors to grant individual dispensations.

Several priests took positions in the government after rebels led by the Sandinista Liberation Front ousted the

dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza in 1979.

The priests defended their decisions on the grounds that qualified lay people were lacking.

During his one-day visit to Nicaragua last March, Pope John Paul urged obedience to the bishops, who had asked the priests holding government posts to resign. The pope's words resulted in a shouting match with government supporters.

Relations between the government and the bishops have deteriorated since then, Bishop Vega said, with more pressure on the Church and less respect for its deepest convictions.

The Nicaraguan bishops last August said the government was moving toward an "absolute dictatorship of a political party."

In November, Church-state tensions worsened when Sandinista groups prevented Sunday Masses in several Churches after the bishops had criticized the govern-

ment's conscription law.

Speaking about the current relations with the government, Bishop Vega said that the bishops would continue to work for socio-economic and political changes in Nicaragua, but not for a "Marxist-Leninist model" forced on the people.

"I've told the revolutionary leaders many times that the Church today can contribute much more than any ideology that pretends to set man free while in reality it is pushing him in a hole and suffocating him," he said.

Bishop Vega said the bishops in Nicaragua stress three principles in dialogue with the government: that people choose their own social structures; non-alignment of the nation; and the freedom of citizens from "mechanisms and powers based on imperialist theories and ambitions."

The Church, he said, was ready to offer its mediation between the government and its opposition. Armed bands

of Nicaraguan exiles have for months waged a border war in northern Nicaragua from bases in Honduras.

Pope John Paul's 1983 trip to Nicaragua, Bishop Vega said, left the Church more united.

He defended the pope's criticism of the "popular" Church in Nicaragua, local Christian organizations involved as groups in Sandinista and government projects.

The "popular" Church, Bishop Vega said, does not promote the values or responsibilities of man, but instead destroys religious values.

"In my opinion, the 'popular' Church is nothing but an international network. Today it is evident that the progress of the 'popular' Church lies in its capacity to create an image outside the country. It has a vast network of publications at every level and personnel who work full time. Its strength is in internationalism," he said.

Argentine Bishops Involved in Human Rights Turmoil

Buenos Aires, Argentina (NC) — Catholic Church leaders have become involved in the human rights turmoil sweeping Argentina since

December when an elected civilian government replaced the military regime which came to power in a 1976 coup.

Laghi Says He'll Be Pronuncio to U.S.

Colorado Springs, Colo. (NC) — Archbishop Pio Laghi, apostolic delegate in the United States, told a press conference that he will be the Vatican's first pronuncio in Washington.

In Colorado Springs for the installation of Bishop Richard Hanifen as head of the new Diocese of Colorado Springs, Archbishop Laghi said Jan. 30 that his ambassadorial credentials already have been approved by the White House and that announcement of his new post is scheduled to come after Senate approval of the nomination of William Wilson as ambassador to the Holy See.

Raising his status to ambassador would permit a

"more candid and frank exchange in what we say and think," Archbishop Laghi said. He said the formal ties would give the Holy See "real moral power in speaking in the name of human dignity, human rights and peace and justice."

Establishment of relations also signifies "a great step ahead. It means bigotry is almost over, as it should be," the archbishop added.

At Archbishop Laghi's Washington office, which has begun calling itself the Vatican embassy, a staff member Feb. 6 said the archbishop is likely to be named pronuncio although no formal appointment had yet been announced.

While the national government has named one bishop to a national committee gathering evidence of human rights violations by security forces, a provincial governor has forced another to resign as police chaplain because of his ties to a former police chief accused of human rights crimes.

While the executive committee of the Argentine Bishops Conference had been privately and publicly pressuring the military about human rights abuses, an ex-military president under arrest on human rights charges has said he consulted with four bishops about the morality of the military's anti-guerrilla campaign and could not get clear guidelines.

The turmoil stems from the military's self-proclaimed "dirty war" against guerrillas in the 1970s and from mounting evidence, including the discoveries of secret graveyards, that this included the illegal killing and torturing of thousands of people. Human rights organizations estimate that as many as 30,000 people have disappeared without a trace after being taken by security forces.

Since President Raul Alfonsin was inaugurated Dec. 10, top armed forces officers have been arrested and ordered to appear before military courts on charges that they were involved in the disappearances. Other military leaders have been forced into retirement.

Prior to Alfonsin's inauguration many civilians had begun filing court suits against military men in the cases of relatives who disappeared.

To coordinate the gathering of evidence Alfonsin created the Presidential Commission on Disappeared Persons. Members of the committee include Catholic Bishop Jaime De Nevares of Neuquen, Methodist Bishop Carlos Gattinoni and U.S.-born Rabbi Marshall Meyer, director of the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary in Buenos Aires.

Bishop De Nevares has been a member of several Argentine human rights organizations and last August asked for an investigation into the 1976 death of Bishop Enrique Angelelli of La Rioja. Bishop De Nevares said Bishop Angelelli had been murdered, probably by security forces, because he was investigating the murders of two of his diocesan priests. Bishop Angelelli had been officially reported as having died in an automobile accident.

Another member of the hierarchy, however, Archbishop Antonio Plaza of La Plata, was forced into retirement as chaplain of the Buenos Aires provincial police force by newly elected provincial Governor Alejandro Armendariz, a member of Alfonsin's Radical Party.

A decree issued by Armendariz termed the re-

tirement "obligatory."

The action came after accusations mounted that the 30,000-member provincial police force, under ex-police chief Ramon Camps, was involved in the torturing and killing of thousands of people. Evidence includes newspaper reports in Spain quoting Camps as saying that thousands of people disappeared as a result of his counterinsurgency campaign.

Camps has denied he gave the interviews but one Spanish reporter says he has tapes of his interview in which Camps said he was involved in the deaths of at least 5,000 people.

"We believe that the police leadership should pass to others who were not tied to the episodes which are of public notoriety," said Armendariz. Replacement of the top police officers includes "the spritual adviser to all of them," he added.

Camps has been arrested and ordered to stand trial. Archbishop Plaza, 74, became chaplain in November 1976 under Camps.

"My crime is to have assisted police personnel and the relatives of policemen killed," said Archbishop Plaza after he was forced to retire as chaplain.

Meanwhile, during an investigation of the Navy, a non-commissioned officer, Raul Vilarino, testified that a secret prison existed at the Navy Mechanical School where thousands of people were tortured and killed. He

said Father Pablo Sosa, a Navy chaplain, was an eyewitness to abuses.

During testimony on the Army's role in the anti-guerrilla campaign, Gen. Reynaldo Bignone, the last military president, said he asked four bishops about the moral aspects of the campaign while he was rector of the Military College.

Bignone said he asked the bishops how far the military could go in getting information from a subversive if they knew this information could lead to the rescue of an innocent kidnap victim.

The bishops could not answer specifically and only one said a prisoner could not be forced to speak against his will, according to Bignone, who is also under arrest on human rights charges.

Bignone did not name the four bishops. His statements caused some human rights activists to criticize the bishops, saying they were too close to the military leaders to effectively pressure for an end to human rights abuses. Many bishops have said that their contacts with the military allowed them to save the lives of many people who had been detained.

Last September the bishops' conference published a series of its messages to the military government criticizing the human rights situation and asking for information about missing persons. Many of the messages had been previously unpublished.

Catholic Women Bowlers Sought for Anniversary

A reunion call went out last week to women who have bowled with the Rochester Catholic Women's Bowling League during the past 25 years.

The league will celebrate its anniversary in May.

According to Marjorie

Volke, president of the organization, anyone who has bowled with the league and would like to participate in the celebration, should call her (716) 442-2564.

At present 25 women actively pursue league activities, she said.