

Catholic Church a rallying point in Philippine election aftermath

Manila, Philippines (NC) — In the unsettled aftermath of the Feb. 7 Philippine presidential election, the country's Catholic Church has been a rallying point for dismayed government vote counters and for supporters of the opposition.

The country's leading Catholic churchman, Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila, has condemned what appears to be widespread electoral fraud.

Church people also have been a target for criticism from President Ferdinand Marcos, who as of Feb. 10 was confident of winning another term.

Responding to questions about alleged

election violations by his supporters, Marcos said the real problem was that voters were being "held back by priests, nuns and Namfrel representatives."

Nanfrel is the popular term for the National Movement for Free Elections, a private election-monitoring organization.

Cardinal Sin said that Catholic priests had denied him a landslide victory by trying to dissuade people from voting for him.

The country's Catholic bishops planned a Feb. 13 meeting to discuss the Church's role in the next government.

Votes were still being counted Feb. 10, with some predictions that the tallying would

take at least another two days. Reports of ballot box theft, violence and intimidation of voters have marred the election.

Cardinal Sin praised Namfrel during a Feb. 9 Mass and criticized "widespread disenfranchisement of qualified voters" during the election. He urged "all those in power, all those who are involved in the process of counting the vote...to act in the light of their conscience."

The cardinal has been critical of the Marcos government. But in recent months he has called for national reconciliation to counteract increasing politically motivated violence.

Speaking at the same Mass, Mrs. Aquino also praised the Namfrel workers, giving "thanks for all those brave people who have given so much in the last days." She has claimed victory.

Later, speaking at a Mass in another church, the opposition candidate said she had prayed for help in peacefully taking over the government from Marcos.

Thousands of her supporters greeted her at the two services.

As the vote was being counted in Manila the same day, 30 employees of a government vote-counting center walked off their jobs, saying that computer printout numbers favoring Mrs. Aquino were being ignored.

One worker said Mrs. Aquino was ahead by 100,000 votes in the computer tally, but the publicly posted figures showed Marcos ahead by more than 30,000 votes.

The workers, mostly computer terminal operators, took refuge at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church in Manila and discussed what to do. Many were sobbing, according to news reports, and appeared to be frightened as they left the counting center. They refused to give their names.

Later, a spokeswoman for the group said they had left because "we feel that we have been used."

"We noticed that the generated output was not the same values as we were inputting," she said.

"My feeling is that the count is being managed, manipulated," U.S. Sen. Richard G. Lugar, R-Ind., said Feb. 8. Lugar led a delegation of U.S. observers to the Philippines to monitor the elections.

The United States has a keen interest in the island-nation because of its strategic position on Pacific shipping lanes and because it is the home of two large U.S. military bases.

As he prepared to leave the country Feb. 10, the senator said "the word 'clean,' in its absolute form, is obviously not appropriate to what we have observed."

Philippine bishops back non-violent struggle for justice

Manila, Philippines (NC) — The Philippine bishops' conference has called for a "non-violent struggle for justice" in the wake of allegations the government fraudulently counted the votes from the Feb. 7 presidential election.

"We are not going to effect the change we seek by doing nothing, by sheer apathy," said a statement issued by the bishops Feb. 14.

"If we did nothing, we would be party to our own destruction as a people. We would be jointly guilty with the perpetrators of the wrong we want righted," the bishops said.

The bishops said the elections were an unparalleled fraud and that voting was marked by intimidation, harassment, terrorism and murder.

"A government that seizes, assumes or retains power through fraudulent means has no moral basis," the bishops said.

Their statement was issued as a Philippine National Assembly committee counted votes that showed President Ferdinand Marcos leading opposition candidate Corazon Aquino.

A 20-member U.S. observer delegation, headed by Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., has accused the Marcos campaign of "massaging and manipulating" the vote. In Washington, Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., asked President

Reagan to notify the Philippines that U.S. aid would be cut off if "the will of the Philippine voters, as expressed at the ballot box, is not followed." At least 17 opposition workers were killed during the Feb. 7 election and the following week. One opposition strategist said Marcos had launched an "extermination" campaign against Mrs. Aquino's workers.

The bishops said that "the people have spoken, or have tried to.... We, the bishops, believe that on the basis of our assessment as pastors of the recently concluded polls, what they attempted to say is clear enough."

They told the people to form their own judgments about the election, and if they agreed with the bishops, "we must come together and discern what appropriate actions to take."

"Now is the time to speak," they said. "Now is the time to repair the wrong. The wrong was systematically organized. So must its correction be."

Rene Saguisag, a campaign aide to Mrs. Aquino, said the bishops' statement was significant because "it comes from a highly respected institution that has its ears to the ground."

About 84 percent of the 52 million Filipinos are Catholic.

Philippine Deputy Minister of Justice

Manuel Garcia said the bishops' statement will "divide the people and the nation."

"I believe it is not too late for some members of the bishops' conference to ponder the consequences of such a rash decision, which clearly poses an imminent threat to the peace and tranquility of our country during this time when so many are blinded by partisan rage," said Garcia. "The church is more than ever needed to minister to the spiritual needs of an emotionally fractured nation and to heal the wounds of division..."

Garcia, who is also a member of Parliament for Marcos' New Society Movement, the majority party, said the party has evidence to prove clergy and Religious committed illegal acts during the elections.

Labor Minister Blas Ople said the bishops' statement was a coded way of asking for civil disobedience.

"The bishops have broken with all precedents. They have defied the well-established rule against the church's participating in political affairs," said Ople.

Mrs. Aquino has said she will lead street protests if Marcos cheats her out of the election. She had scheduled a Feb. 16 rally at which Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila was to celebrate Mass.

Despite celebrations of new hope Haiti's future remains uncertain

By Greg Erlandsop,
NC News Service

Church officials and human rights organizations expressed cautious optimism about the future of Haiti when its president for life, Jean-Claude Duvalier, fled the country.

Celebratory street demonstrations broke out in Haiti but in the capital city of Port-au-Prince demonstrators became violent as the day progressed.

Demonstrators attacked the tomb of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, father of Jean-Claude and dictator of Haiti from 1957 to 1971, digging up his coffin and scattering the remains.

Haitian communities in Florida celebrated in the streets, and the Haitian consulate in Boston was temporarily seized by demonstrators, some chanting anti-American slogans.

Two Catholic bishops with large Haitian communities in their dioceses issued state-

ments applauding the fall of Duvalier and calling for a new government based upon freedom and equality.

Duvalier, his wife and 23 other family members fled Port-au-Prince aboard a U.S. Air Force plane early Feb. 7. He was being granted temporary refuge in France until a country could be found to grant him permanent asylum.

The Duvalier family had controlled Haiti for 29 years, but in the last month street demonstrations and increasing violence led to a "state of siege" precipitating Duvalier's departure. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with a \$300 per capita income.

Haitians awoke to a 7:20 a.m. broadcast announcing Duvalier's departure and the formation of a six-member governing council headed by Army Chief of Staff Gen. Henri Namphy. Two of the council's members are civilians.

Human rights observers and Church officials in the United States applauded the change in government, but expressed concern about some of the members of the new government, and about the role of the United States in the weeks to come.

"Every Haitian feels that everything should be done to avoid more bloodshed and the possibility of military intervention," said Fritz Longchamp, executive director of the Washington Office on Haiti.

But Longchamp, while welcoming the change in government "as a first step toward democracy and liberation," expressed concern about the "overwhelming presence on (the governing council) of military and civilians who were closely associated with the Duvalier regime."

Longchamp said that only one member, Gerard Gourgue, chairman of the Haitian Human Rights Commission, "enjoys a lot of credibility among the Haitian people." But he acknowledged that the military members of the council, including Gen. Namphy, have not been closely identified with the repression.

"They are from the liberal wing of the military," Longchamp said, "but they made their way to the top by serving Duvalier."

The only other civilian member of the council is Duvalier's minister of public works, Alix Cineas.

Longchamp said it was not "the proper role of the U.S." to fly Duvalier into exile. But he noted that when Duvalier was sworn in as president at the age of 19, it took place 15 minutes after midnight with only his mother, his brother-in-law and the U.S. ambassador looking on.

"He left the same way he came in," said Longchamp.

Longchamp said that the Catholic Church is widely respected in Haiti. He said that one sign of this was the fact that when Haitians in Port-au-Prince first heard of the Duvalier's flight, they gathered in front of the Catholic radio station, Soleil, which had been closed by the Duvalier government.

Father Thomas Wenski, director of the Haitian Catholic Center of the Archdiocese of Miami, said he believes the Church in Haiti can ensure that no Duvalier people are included in a future, more permanent government structure.

He also predicted that many Haitians will return to Haiti once the political situation has stabilized.

In Miami, center of a large Haitian community which had been awaiting the fall of Duvalier, Haitians celebrated in the streets after hearing the news. Archbishop Edward A. McCarthy of Miami was scheduled to



Sheer joy can be read on the faces of hundreds of Haitians in the streets of Miami's "Little Haiti" as word spread of Haitian president Jean-Claude Duvalier's flight from their homeland. (NC photo)

preside at an open air Mass Feb. 9 at Notre Dame de Haiti Chapel in Miami.

In a statement released Feb. 7, Archbishop McCarthy said Miami's Catholics joined with the Haitians "as they rejoice and praise the Lord for the freedom and new hope that has come to their beloved homeland."

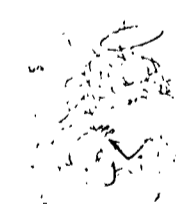
"We pray with them that, free from any oppressive forces, they might now create a nation under God of freedom, justice, peace and prosperity," he said.

Bishop Thomas Daily of Palm Beach, Fla., where more than 20,000 Haitians reside, also issued a statement praying for "a quick and just resolution to the conflicts and injustices which have existed for so long among the Haitian people."

"May the violence and unrest cease and may the Haitian people join hands to forge anew government based upon the equality and dignity of all men and women."

In the coming weeks, Longchamp said he expected to see a change in the provisional government, but he did not know how long it would be before elections were held.

Two names mentioned as possible civilian leaders were Gregoire Eugene, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Haiti in Port-au-Prince, and Marc Bazin, currently on leave from the World Bank.



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