

# National/International Report

## In Philippines:

### Bishops endorse proposed constitution

Manila, Philippines (NC) — The Philippine bishops' conference has endorsed a proposed new national constitution, which Church people had a hand in drafting.

But the bishops said they would avoid pressuring opponents of the constitution to vote for ratification.

The endorsement was approved by 62 of 69 bishops attending a mid-November administrative council meeting, said one participant. The conference has 91 members.

The draft constitution is scheduled for a ratification vote Feb. 2.

Conference president Cardinal Ricardo J. Vidal of Cebu said the bishops believe the proposed constitution is "consistent" with Catholic teachings.

He said the document's ratification would lead to national stability. But the cardinal added that the bishops will not impose their position on those "who by reason of conscience or conviction" decide to reject the draft.

Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila, a supporter of President Corazon Aquino, came out strongly for ratification before the conference meeting. But he said his stand was taken as a private citizen and he "didn't want to compromise the bishops, should they take another position."

The bishops' endorsement was contained in a pastoral letter titled "A Covenant Toward Peace," issued Nov. 25. The constitution was a chief topic of their Nov. 20-21 meeting in Manila.

In the pastoral, the bishops said the constitution would allow the government to conduct its programs.

"At this historical moment, many forces are striving mightily to destabilize what we have gained dramatically in February 1986," they said, referring to the non-violent toppling of President Ferdinand Marcos. "We believe that this new constitution will provide a firm basis for governance, a clear direction for national renewal and development, and a covenant toward peace."

Although most of the bishops attending

the meeting voted to back the draft, the resolutions were not reached easily, said Auxiliary Bishop Teodoro Bacani of Manila. "In no way are the bishops a monolithic group," said Bishop Bacani — one of three Church people appointed by President Aquino to the constitutional drafting commission.

The bishops said they will encourage people in their areas to register to vote in the February referendum. However, they said they decided against a national effort similar to the National Movement for Free Elections

which served as a watchdog against fraud in the presidential elections last February.

"Unlike the past election, the bishops are no longer worried about fraud," Bishop Francisco Claver of Malaybalay said. They are mainly concerned that "the people have a chance to express their choice," he said.

Bishop Antonio Fortich of Bacolod urged the 135 priests of his diocese to support ratification. "We must guard the precious gift... given us," he said, referring to the February revolution when "God manifested his will."

### Cardinal praises cabinet replacements

Manila, Philippines (NC) — Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila reacted favorably to a cabinet shake-up, praising the Philippines' new defense minister, Gen. Rafael Ilet, as a "no-nonsense" official loyal to President Corazon Aquino.

Ilet replaced Juan Ponce Enrile who resigned after months of political contention with Aquino. Other cabinet ministers also submitted their resignations in late November at the president's request.

"Already, people are saying this is the second miracle," Cardinal Sin said, alluding to the peaceful revolt which toppled President Ferdinand Marcos. But if Aquino "is to conserve the gains she has made, she must make good on her promise to weed out the inept and the corrupt in her cabinet," he said.

"It was God who installed her last February," the cardinal said. "How can God allow her to fail?"

Bishop Antonio Fortich of Bacolod told journalists in Bacolod City that the cabinet shake-up was a "master stroke" that showed the president is in control of her government.

Since Aquino came to power in February, she has been challenged by Enrile and others who urged an all-out military campaign to

stop a growing communist insurgency. The president sought a negotiated truce.

A few days after Enrile resigned, communists guerrillas and Aquino's government agreed to a cease-fire.

Ilet, 66, is a West Point graduate. He was armed forces vice chief of staff in 1974-78 and served as ambassador to Iran and then to Thailand.

The new defense minister is highly respected by the army because of his "impressive military and diplomatic record," said retired Philippine Gen. Manuel Flores.

Members of the Philippine bishops' conference met Nov. 20-21 to discuss possible action in the deepening political situation. Retired Bishop Francisco Claver of Malaybalay said later the country's political centrists were "disillusioned, even cynical and lacking a rallying point to galvanize their forces."

In October, Bishop Claver called Enrile typical of older politicians "who will do anything, say anything, to keep themselves in or get themselves into positions of power."

"Enrile's fulminations have become rather tiresome, and the reason is simply that he is so predictable, as predictable as when he worked for Marcos," Bishop Claver said.

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