

World & Nation

Pope meets Central American leaders as peace talks begin

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II met privately with several key players in the Central American peace process in late-January, as Nicaraguan talks got under way in Costa Rica.

Within the space of three days, the pope conducted separate meetings with Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega; Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo of Managua, Nicaragua, who has mediated his country's talks; and Salvadoran Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas, who has served as a mediator for peace talks in his country. He also met with Honduran Foreign Minister Carlos Lopez Contreras.

In San Jose, Costa Rica January 29, Nicaraguan government and rebel representatives ended a two-day meeting at a Catholic seminary and agreed to meet again February 10-12 in Guatemala.

Auxiliary Bishop Bosco Vivas Robelo of Managua said he found "good will on both sides to seek a cease-fire in Nicaragua" in the near future. "There was what we would call a verbal cease-fire," he said.

At the Vatican, an official who declined to be identified said Pope John Paul was interested in deepening the process of negotiation and reconciliation in Central America.

Although Cardinal Obando Bravo declined to give details of his January 27 meeting with the pope, Ortega told reporters January 29 that the pope supports the Central American peace plan and sovereignty for the people of the region.

Ortega, who described his conversation with the pope as "very frank" and "very constructive," added that the pope re-emphasized his hope that the Central American peace plan become a reality.

It was the first meeting between Ortega and Pope John Paul since a 1983 visit to Nicaragua was marred by demonstrations during a papal Mass. The half-hour private meeting in the papal library was conducted in Spanish, without aides or translators.

Although the pope received Ortega privately, thus eschewing the elaborate protocol and exchange of speeches of a formal visit by a head of state, Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls afterward gave a summary of topics discussed.

According to Navarro-Valls, Ortega told

the pope of the "prospects that are developing in compliance with the proposals" of the Central American peace plan. The spokesman added that Ortega "asked that the Holy See encourage this process."

The pope in turn expressed his hope for peace in the region, Navarro-Valls said, "underlining the necessity that it is attained through a fair dialogue, respecting the rights and fundamental liberty of all."

The peace plan designed by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez includes El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala.

The pope said he hoped "the peace plan would find an effective application in each of its points, not obscuring some elements, and in particular the right of populations to live in a political regime according to the principles of true democracy," Navarro-Valls said.

One of the points of the Central American peace plan apparently included in this appeal was the prohibition against outside aid for insurgent movements. However, Navarro-Valls declined to comment on whether or to what extent U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan rebels, or contras, was discussed.

The Reagan administration has called for \$36.2 million in new aid for the contras in a bill Congress was scheduled to vote on February 3.

Before the Ortega visit, Nicaragua's ambassador to the Holy See said his president would ask the pope to pressure the United States to end its support for the contras.

Navarro-Valls said the pope added that the peace process "cannot lack the encouragement of the Holy See and of all the Church, as the mediation role that Cardinal Obando Bravo and other pastors have agreed to develop shows."

The meeting with Ortega was preceded by a January 27 meeting with Cardinal Obando Bravo. The cardinal and Archbishop Rivera Damas were in Italy for a celebration of the centenary of the death of the founder of the Salesian order.

Cardinal Obando Bravo told journalists January 28 that the Nicaraguan government still has to take some important concrete steps toward democracy. These include a general amnesty instead of the "conditional

amnesty" being offered and holding genuine presidential elections, he said.

For the rebels, whom he called "the resistance," the "problem of the war is the lack of democracy," the cardinal said.

However, the cardinal said that as long as the Nicaraguan government is moving toward democracy, the United States should freeze aid to the contras.

The cardinal also said church-state tensions have lessened, but for a significant improvement to come about the government would have to allow the return of church people expelled in recent years. Of 16 people expelled, only three have been allowed to return, the cardinal said, and one of these — Bishop Antonio Pablo Vega of the Prelature

of Juigalpa — has declined.

The previous day in Washington, Bishop Vega told a press conference that U.S. aid for the contras is vital to fight off "international forces" intent on preventing Nicaragua from achieving true peace.

The pope met January 25 and 29 with Archbishop Rivera Damas, but the Vatican released no details of the meetings.

The archbishop later told Vatican Radio that the United States, the Salvadoran rebel movement and the Nicaraguan government are all possible hindrances to lasting peace.

On January 29, El Salvador's armed forces chief ruled out peace talks with leftist rebels, saying they should take part in March elections.

CUA trustees again delay decision on Father Curran's teaching status

Washington (NC) — The board of trustees of The Catholic University of America in Washington has postponed a decision on the teaching status of moral theologian Father Charles E. Curran, who was suspended last year after the Vatican ruled that he was not eligible to teach as a Catholic theologian.

It was the second time the board delayed action.

University counsel Craig Parker said in a January 26 statement that it was "premature to comment" on the matter because university rules "require no public statements be made by the parties until proceedings are completed, including a final decision by the board of trustees."

The next trustees meeting is to be April 12. Father Curran, who was scheduled to speak in Rochester on Wednesday, Feb. 3, as part of the Downtown Community Forum lecture series of St. Mary's Church, reportedly appeared before the closed-door trustees' meeting. NC News Service could not reach him for comment, however.

Father Curran, who currently is teaching at Cornell University in Ithaca as the university's first visiting professor of Catholic studies, was suspended from his post at Catholic University in January 1987

by Archbishop James A. Hickey of Washington, CUA chancellor.

The priest has been under threat of dismissal from his teaching post since the summer of 1986, when the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith informed him that, because of his dissent from certain official Church teachings, he was not eligible or suitable to teach as a Catholic theologian.

Following the notice from the doctrinal congregation, Archbishop Hickey initiated proceedings to remove Father Curran from his post.

He was suspended while awaiting results of an internal academic review of an order to withdraw his license to teach on the ecclesiastical faculty of the university's theology department.

The Academic Senate conducted the review under procedures established to assure academic freedom at the school.

Father Curran also filed a civil lawsuit last March to overturn the suspension.

The Academic Senate report was not completed in time for the board's October meeting and had been held over for the January 26 meeting.



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Dining Around the Diocese
The first issue of each month, the Courier-Journal will be featuring some prime dining spots in and around the Rochester diocese. If you, or someone you know would like to have your restaurant included in our Dining Guide, call the Courier-Journal at 326-4340. Look for our Dining Guide in the upcoming months, and pay a visit to the restaurant of your choice, and enjoy a pleasant evening of "Dining Around the Diocese."