

World & Nation

Central American bishops urge end to arms shipments

San Salvador, El Salvador (NC) — Central American bishops have urged an end to superpower arms shipments to their war-torn region and condemned interests that are obstructing peace-making efforts for financial or ideological gain.

The continuation of war, the statement said, "favors the profit of some" and "is due to the ideological obstinance of others," all the while causing "the great suffering of the majority."

The bishops also expressed concern for the suffering in Panama caused by economic sanctions aimed at toppling Gen. Manuel Noriega, who has been accused of drug trafficking.

Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas of San Salvador presided over the meeting, which was attended by bishops from Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua and Honduras.

In a statement issued at the close of the gathering, the bishops appealed to "all the nations involved, and especially the superpowers — the United States and the Soviet Union ... (to) send no more arms to Central America."

The bishops also appealed to their own governments and people for an end to armed conflict.

When war "becomes also a business for some, and a way of expanding in the area of narcotics trafficking for others, then its consequences are still more devastating for moral, patriotic and also religious values," the statement said.

They said they hoped the recent cease-fire between the Nicaraguan government and the U.S.-backed "contras" would become "a definitive silencing of weapons, that it will be the beginning of a peace which brings mutual understanding and cooperation."

The cease-fire was agreed upon as a prelude to face-to-face peace talks between the government and armed opposition leaders, or "contras."

Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo of Managua, Nicaragua, left the Salvadoran meeting early to return to his country to observe the peace talks.

The bishops expressed concern for delays in finding a "solution to the political conflict" in Panama.

"We are worried by the negative consequences the economic sanctions bring to the people," they said.

The bishops' concern echoed a statement Costa Rican President Oscar Arias issued in Washington April 14. Arias said the Reagan administration's economic sanctions against Noriega were not effective.

"Economic sanctions are not the best answer," Arias said. "You'll be punishing the people of Panama, not Noriega. It is better to seek mediation and conciliation."



Calling for democracy, liberty and cash, teachers in Panama criticize General Manuel Noriega and urge reopening of schools, which, like banks, have been closed during continued political upheaval.

USCC president warns against foreign intervention

By Bill Pritchard

Washington (NC) — The president of the U.S. bishops' conference has expressed support for the efforts of Panama's bishops to resolve the political troubles in their country, and has repeated a warning against "foreign intervention" in the Latin American nation.

"The voice of the Church in Panama has been clear and consistent in denouncing the instances of civic corruption and state violence that have tragically become so much a part of recent news reports," Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis said in an April 4 letter to Panama Archbishop Marcos G. McGrath.

Archbishop May also cited warnings by the U.S. and Panamanian hierarchies against outside intervention. Those warnings followed calls by some Panamanians for

direct U.S. action to remove Panamanian defense chief and de facto ruler Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega. During the past month, the United States has heavily reinforced its bases in Panama.

"We continue to urge our own national leaders to exercise the greatest care in balancing the pursuit of legitimate U.S. interests in the region with the essential quest for a peaceful and just settlement of this crisis," the U.S. conference president said.

The Panamanian bishops have called on Noriega to resign. They also have called on him to formally agree to discussions with his political opponents.

Noriega's initial resistance to that demand contributed to an abrupt end to efforts at launching Church-mediated talks between the government and the opposition. On April 9, however, the military strongman gave

written assent to the talks.

Archbishop McGrath had reached a tentative agreement with the government April 5 to arbitrate negotiations toward settling the country's political and economic crisis. But the effort broke down when Noriega at first refused to accede in writing to negotiations, and when two of the opposition groups refused to proceed with talks without a promise from the general that he would step down.

On April 9, Noriega made public a letter to Archbishop McGrath in which he agreed to dialogue and restated his position that President Manuel Solis Palma — widely regarded as Noriega's puppet — would be the government spokesman.

As of April 12, Archbishop McGrath had not replied to the Noriega letter.

Draft of proposed women's pastoral draws criticism, praise

By Cindy Woodon

Washington (NC) — Although some women's groups have praised the U.S. bishops' draft pastoral on women, others have called it weak or challenged its creation of "a new sin."

If the bishops are serious about ending sexism, they would call for the ordination of women, feminist critics said.

On the other hand, groups favoring traditional roles for women charged that in writing the pastoral, the bishops gave in to the agenda of "militant feminists."

The first published draft of the pastoral, written by a committee headed by Bishop Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Ill., was released April 12. It calls sexism a sin against human dignity, asks that all Church roles not requiring ordination be open to women, urges an end to the economic inequities women suffer, and says that men need to be more responsible in marriage and family relationships.

Ruth Fitzpatrick, national coordinator of the Women's Ordination Conference, said the bishops were "boxed in from the beginning" by having to uphold Church teachings against the ordination of women and against the use of artificial birth control.

"They call for compassion" toward women who feel undervalued in a Church which won't ordain them and for women who feel oppressed by the Church's position on birth control, she said. But "women want justice, not compassion."

"It's in vogue right now to beat your breast and confess to sin," Fitzpatrick said of the bishops' acknowledgment that sexism has "colored Church teaching and practice." But it's not enough, she said. "We look at their actions, not just their words."

"The document fails to suggest substantive changes that would alleviate the sexism that women experience in their own Church," said a statement from the Chicago-based National Assembly of Religious Women.

"This document apologizes for 'sins of sexism,' but continues to avoid the acceptance of women as full participants and mutual decisionmakers in all Church ministries," the statement said.

Priests for Equality, an organization claiming 3,000 Catholic clergy as members, called the draft pastoral a "muddled statement which attempts to please everyone yet satisfies no one."

"The document indicts itself by exonerating priests and bishops from responsibility regarding the sin of sexism," said Father Joseph A. Dearborn, national secretary of the group.

"The draft admits culpability on the part of bishops for not challenging sexism in society — a sin of omission," he said. But it fails to accept responsibility for actions "on the part of the hierarchy in perpetuating the sin of sexism in the Church."

Phyllis Schlafly, head of the Chicago-based Eagle Forum which opposes feminism, said in a statement that sexism is a "phony sin." She accused the bishops of "trying to create a new sin, hitherto unknown to the Ten Commandments, the laws of the Church, the seven capital sins and the sacrament of confession."

Following the pastoral's logic, she said, one would come to the conclusion that "God himself was the first sexist because he clearly established separate roles for men and women."

The pastoral draft is "flawed in its

methodology," according to Women for Faith and Family, and it "ignores the real dangers of feminist excesses and the link between feminism and abortion."

Helen Hull Hitchcock of St. Louis, representing the group, issued a joint statement April 14 with Angela F. Grimm, director of The Catholic Center in Washington. They said the draft "does not truly address the needs of most American Catholic women," including "the lack of authentic and authoritative moral and religious education for their children, subtle and overt discrimination against women who choose to devote their lives to raising their families, and the pervasive anti-religious influence of contemporary society."

"We fear that the draft will create further division and disunity within the Church and contribute to the erosion of the true evangelical witness of the Catholic faith to the modern world," the statement said.

Polly Hessel of Green Bay, Wis., a former member of National Marriage Encounter board of trustees, said the draft "still emphasizes a belief that the proper role of women is to be wives and mothers, not individuals."

"The bishops are emphatic in promoting women's rights in civil law, but not in canon law," she said. "Let's clean our own house first."

The director of the National Black Sisters Conference praised the draft's discussion of how racism and sexism often combine in U.S. society to place women of color and their children in extreme poverty.

Holy Names Sister Marie DePorres Taylor of Oakland, Calif., said the remaining question is how the Church will implement policies and practices to address those

problems. Minority women, who head a large portion of the poor, single-parent families, need help with education, day care and employment, she said.

While the pastoral "addressed some of the key issues" concerning women in the Church and in society, the draft is weak in its examination of patriarchy and in other areas, said St. Joseph Sister Janet Roesener, executive director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in Silver Spring, Md.

The pervasiveness of patriarchy in the Church's structure needs fuller examination, she said. Also, before proposing that women be ordained to the diaconate, the bishops should discuss "the whole idea of what the permanent diaconate should be."

Some, however, praised the document. The draft is "faithful to the Church's values, yet fosters renewal," said Mary Ann Kramer of Lucan, Minn., president of the National Council of Catholic Women.

"I am impressed by the tone of compassion in the pastoral, the affirmation of women's gifts and talents, the call for the opening of the diaconate to women, and the support for homemakers and child-rearers," Kramer said.

The publication of the draft is "a moment of truth for all us," said Bishop Walter F. Sullivan of Richmond, Va. Addressing an April 13 conference in Kansas City, Mo., the bishop said the draft is "an urgent call to pick up the quality and the tempo of the dialogue ... on the role of women in the Church."

Contributing to this story were Jerry Filteau in Washington and Dennis Coday in Kansas City, Mo.