

World & Nation

Pope calls for end to South Africa's 'racist vision'

By John Thavis

Harare, Zimbabwe (NC) — On the first leg of a five-nation African visit, Pope John Paul II wasted no time in tackling one of the trip's unofficial themes: the injustice of apartheid.

Even before he reached his first stop in Zimbabwe September 10, the pope told reporters aboard his plane that apartheid, South Africa's system of strict racial separation, represented "a racist vision of human inequality" that "cannot be continued."

The pope also expressed his "admiration" for imprisoned South African black leader Nelson Mandela, and said he hoped he would be freed soon. Asked if he would appeal for Mandela's release during the visit, the pope replied: "Leave that to me."

Meanwhile, on the eve of the pope's departure for Zimbabwe, the Vatican released a two-page statement indicating that a papal visit to South Africa was a possibility even under apartheid, South Africa's system of racial separation, which the Church has condemned.

In explaining South Africa's exclusion from the current itinerary, the statement cited scheduling difficulties.

The statement added that the pope hopes

to visit South Africa "in as prolonged and complete a form as possible," in part to encourage the many Catholics who are working for justice and peace there.

In his first speech after he landed in Zimbabwe, the pope called apartheid a "serious injustice" that had caused "immense suffering."

Speaking that evening to southern African bishops, the pope again explored apartheid's effects, emphasizing that the Church's response to racial confrontation must always be that of dialogue and prayer, and never violence.

The pope's remarks underscored that, despite South Africa's exclusion from the 10-day trip, apartheid could not help but cast its shadow on the journey.

Perhaps the strongest words came at an airport welcoming ceremony in Harare, Zimbabwe, when the pope, in an apparent reference to South Africa, criticized powers that he said were stifling human rights and strangling the region's future.

"Powerful political, economic and ideological forces endanger the still-fragile stability of countries which are only beginning to consolidate their recently acquired

independence," he said.

Zimbabwe is among several nations that have accused South Africa of a longstanding destabilization campaign designed to keep its neighbors weak.

On the eight-hour flight from Rome, the pope fielded a number of questions about the moral dilemmas posed by apartheid. Asked whether he approved of economic sanctions against South Africa, he said: "I don't know. It is a political question." He said he favored solutions that are "not imposed," but recognized that sanctions are sometimes morally defensible.

The pope said he understood violence by those oppressed by apartheid, but could never justify it. "We can always understand this," he said. "But from the moral point of view it is not a solution that one wishes to propose."

The pope described boycotting elections — recently proposed by some church leaders as an anti-apartheid tool in South Africa — as "possible, but in principle not a good thing."

The pope's address to some 70 members of the Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa drew a sharp line against any tolerance of violence in the anti-

apartheid struggle.

In specific remarks to South African bishops, the pope stated that "Christians cannot accept structures of racial discrimination which violate human rights," and he urged the churchmen to oppose racism by holding "firmly and courageously" to their principles.

But the Church's course, he said, must be steered toward dialogue and conversion.

"You must be fully convinced that only a negotiated settlement of differences can bring true peace and justice. A loss of confidence in the possibility of a peaceful solution could easily lead to further frustration and violence, increasing the threat to peace, not limited to this region," he said.

The region's bishops chose the pope's arrival day to publish a strong call for political action against human rights violations, including detention without trial, torture, racial discrimination and exploitation of women.

They proposed training programs in social analysis for priests, religious and laity, and urged that justice and peace commissions be set up in every parish. The letter was to be read in every church in the region.

South African threatens church groups

Pretoria, South Africa (NC) — South Africa's Law and Order Minister Adriaan C. Vlok warned September 2 that he was considering action against "wolves in sheep's clothing" who hid behind the masks of "liberation theology" and "people's democracy."

He said their "wings should be clipped" in similar fashion to the banning of 19 anti-apartheid organizations — including the United Democratic Front, and, most recently, the End Conscription Campaign — earlier this year.

The Catholic bishops and other church groups have come out strongly in support of the movement to end the military draft and have criticized the bannings.

The day before Vlok issued his warning, police raided the premises of the southern African bishops' conference in Pretoria. Conference official Brother Jude Pieterse said police searched the offices for several hours looking for a booklet sponsored by several church organizations calling for a boycott of October 26 municipal elections. The booklet is illegal under current emergency regulations.

Two days after Vlok's remarks, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu in a sermon at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town called on Anglicans to consider whether they should abstain from voting in the elections. His sermon also violated emergency regulations.

Calls for election boycotts have been declared "subversive" and violators face penalties of up to 10 years in prison and fines equivalent to \$8,000.

Archbishop Tutu said he was aware of the penalties and consciously chose to make his remarks because he was "obeying God" in doing so.

On August 31, a massive bomb explosion ripped through Khotso House, the building in central Johannesburg housing the South African Council of Churches and other anti-apartheid organizations. The structure has since been declared unsafe and has been closed.

No one has been arrested in connection with the blast. An anonymous caller told a newspaper said the bomb was planted by a far-right organization called the White Wolves. But a report on state television said police were investigating the possibility that the explosion was caused by a car bomb or explosives stored in the basement of Khotso House — a suggestion which Archbishop Tutu has called outrageous.

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