

Pope cites social ills during talks in Africa

By John Thavis
NC News

LILONGWE, Malawi — Pope John Paul II, in Africa for the fifth time, highlighted social problems while urging Christians to "transform every situation of human weakness, need and suffering" by living their faith.

The week of May 1-6 took the pope to Reunion, Zambia and Malawi, where he made impassioned appeals on behalf of Third World nations suffering from crushing foreign debt, an influx of refugees and widespread disease and malnutrition.

The answer to these problems, the pope said, lies in two areas: greater international cooperation and a solid commitment to the faith by local Christians.

The pope began his Africa visit the previous week in Madagascar with a call to the island-nation's Catholic minority to work toward reversing a tide of corruption, social disintegration and economic failure.

During his April 28-30 stay in Madagascar, Pope John Paul also urged young people to "refuse violence, refuse contempt, refuse lies and dishonesty."

He also told an audience of diplomats April 30 that "unequal distribution of resources" and the heavy weight of foreign debt on the Third World lay at the base of

Madagascar's economic problems.

From Madagascar, Pope John Paul traveled to the French island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean for an overnight visit May 1.

Calling on Reunion's Catholics to live the Gospel, he counseled those attending a May 2 Mass to "help build a society that is ever more respectful of human rights, without fear of saying no to the slavery of materialisms that could seduce you," he said.

The pope voiced concern about social changes in Reunion, a mostly Catholic island where French culture has dominated in recent years. He cautioned youths that "keeping up with one's neighbor" was becoming the driving principle in Reunion, and, apparently referring to a jump in the divorce rate, said marriage was "a union that no human court can dissolve."

He also addressed the recent increase in magical and occult practices on the island, saying that "the way of magic" is an attempt to appropriate God to oneself and is therefore "a way without hope."

In Zambia May 3, the pontiff delivered a strongly worded talk to diplomats May 3, raising regional issues that have conditioned life in the nation and in much of southern Africa: immense foreign debt,



AP/Wide World Photo

Pope John Paul II is welcomed at the Kwacha stadium Friday, May 5.

swelling numbers of refugees, apartheid and war.

"Is it merely a rhetorical question to ask how many children die every day in Africa because resources are now being swallowed up in debt repayment?" the pope asked.

The question underscored a worsening economic situation in Zambia, which owes about \$6 billion to foreign lenders.

What is needed, the pope said, is a "new and courageous international solidarity"

not based on self-interest. He asked creditor agencies to show more sensitivity to the troubles of borrowing countries and said he was encouraged at recent steps to make repayment easier.

Speaking in a country that has staunchly opposed South Africa's apartheid system of racial segregation, the pope said apartheid was a "dramatic instance" of racism and violated basic Christian principles. He also made clear that he considers dialogue

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Polish officials agree on proposal to legalize church



AP/Wide World Photo

Solidarity leader Lech Walesa and Polish primate Cardinal Jozef Glemp emerge on Friday, May 6, after their first private meeting together since 1985.

By John Thavis
NC News

VATICAN CITY — Church and state officials in Poland agreed on proposed legislation granting the Catholic Church and its activities full legal standing for the first time under the country's communist government.

A Vatican official hailed the move and said it opens the way to full diplomatic relations between Poland and the Holy See.

A church-state commission had spent several years negotiating the proposed law, which was signed April 4 in Warsaw by Archbishop Jerzy Stroba of Poznan and Religious Affairs Minister Wladyslaw Loranc. The government announced it would submit the legislation to the Polish Parliament within the month.

Meanwhile, on April 5, at the close of separate round-table talks also attended by church representatives, the government and the opposition leadership announced agreement on sweeping changes, including democratic elections and the legalization of the trade union Solidarity.

A Vatican official who closely follows Polish affairs said the church-state agreement was a landmark decision that left church leaders satisfied.

The agreement is a "complete and exhaustive document" that touches "practically all aspects of church life," said the

official, who asked not to be identified. He said the proposed law would establish legal standing for the church and its activities, recognize church rights to hold property and goods and regulate their sale and purchase, and recognize church participation in such activities as publishing, religious education and ministry to soldiers.

The Vatican will wait for the Parliament to act on the proposal, then will set a timetable with Polish officials to work out diplomatic relations, he said. The Polish government has been pushing for a full diplomatic exchange with the Vatican for years.

The official said the diplomatic relations issue will be discussed in the "new perspective" of the political steps announced at the end of the round-table talks in Warsaw.

He praised the announced changes, saying they reflected an evolution toward democracy that encourages the Vatican. The legalization of Solidarity, the trade union outlawed in 1981, was seen as "very important," he added.

"This will help a lot," he said of the two agreements. "The road to normalization is open."

An April 5 statement by the Polish bishops' conference said the agreement confirmed the intention by the church and the government to improve their relations, in the interest of Polish society.

Rights workers report death-squad killings on rise in El Salvador

By Mike Tangeman
NC News

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — Catholic human rights workers in El Salvador's capital say death-squad killings are again on the rise since conservatives have taken power in government.

Two directors of Catholic agencies said in separate interviews that political killings by right-wing death squads increased after the National Republican Alliance, known as ARENA, won control of the National Assembly last May.

But other factors were cited as well, including a loss of political control by the seriously ill outgoing president, Jose Napoleon Duarte.

Salvador's president-elect, Alfredo Cristiani, is also an ARENA man. He takes office June 1.

Father Segundo Montes, director of the Institute for Human Rights at the Jesuit-run Central American University, said that

when compared to the eight-month period prior to the May 1988 elections, the incidence of death-squad killings and other rights abuses increased by about 10 percent to 15 percent between May 1988 and February 1989. While Father Montes noted that the numbers are not comparable to the violations registered during 1980-82, he said that "the denunciations that we have received confirm that the human rights situation continues to deteriorate on all levels."

Maria Julia Hernandez, director of the archdiocesan human rights office, Tutela Legal, agreed with Father Montes, saying that human rights continue to be seriously violated in El Salvador.

Hernandez said the country's political situation is so complex that the future of human rights in her country "is for me an 'unknown,' a big question mark."

Those evaluations differ markedly from the perspective of Cristiani, who triumphed as ARENA's candidate in El Salvador's March 19 presidential election. During a recent press conference in Washington, Cristiani said rights abuses and death-squad killings were down from previous levels. He based the statement on a comparison of recent statistics with those from 1979-80.

But Hernandez said it is misleading to compare current figures with those of early atrocities. To adequately evaluate the course of human rights violations in El Salvador, she said, one must differentiate among three distinct periods.

"There was the initial period from 1980-83, which were the years of the most terrible in terms of violations, followed by the period from January 1984 to September 1987, in which there was a lower tendency, a numerical decrease in violations," she said. "But since October 1987 until the present, there has been an increasing trend if we compare this latest period with the

one prior to it."

She said the increased death-squad activity since August 1987 might be the result of fears on the part of the military and the political right that the left would make political inroads as a result of the democratic opening mandated by the 1987 Central American peace accord.

While Father Montes said the rights abuses and death-squad killings clearly increased by 10 percent to 15 percent after the ARENA triumph in the May, 1988, legislative elections, he cautioned that the right-wing party's victory was probably not the only factor involved.

Political analysts and Western diplomats in the region have said that once in office, Cristiani might have difficulty controlling the extremists within ARENA who are associated with former army Maj. Roberto D'Aubuisson. D'Aubuisson was implicated in the founding of the death squads in the early 1980s.