

Pope asks cease-fire in Lebanon

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, Spain — Pope John Paul II has asked for an "immediate cease-fire" in Lebanon, saying the apparent aim of current shelling is to destroy the Christian section of Beirut.

Warring factions in Lebanon need to begin negotiating to reach a peace accord, the pope told about 400,000 people attending an outdoor Mass in Santiago de Compostela Aug. 20.

The pope expressed "profound sorrow" that efforts by the U.N. Security Council had not resulted in an end to the shelling in Beirut between Syrian troops and their allies and Christian-led Lebanese troops. The two sides have been locked in battle since March.

"It appears that the intention seems to be to destroy the city of Beirut, particularly the zones inhabited by Christians," the pope said.

"In the name of God, I renew to all responsible leaders my pressing appeal for harmony and an immediate cease-fire, so that a dialogue can begin," the pope said.

This dialogue should lead to an accord that respects "the legitimate historical and religious rights" of all Lebanese so that they can "live in a climate of peace," the pope said.

The pope spoke at his midday Angelus talk after celebrating an outdoor Mass for about 400,000 people, mostly young people who participated in papal World Youth Day ceremonies the previous day.

During the Mass, a group of Lebanese youths presented him with an appeal to continue working for peace in Lebanon.

However, on Aug. 19 Beirut newspapers published a statement by the pro-Iranian group Hezbollah, Party of God, which threatened "suicide attacks" against the



A Lebanese man stands in the wreckage of his Beirut home, which was damaged during an artillery duel between Christians and Syrians Thursday, Aug. 17. The two groups traded shellfire Thursday, but experienced a relative lull in the five-month-old artillery war as a result of the U.N. Security Council's passage of a cease-fire resolution Tuesday night in New York.

United States, France and the Vatican.

"The French naval buildup in the Mediterranean, the pope's fanatic and biased stands, and America's moves at the Security Council are part of the arrogant campaign aimed at taming the Moslems," the statement said.

The strife in the Mideast country was a steady papal theme during the Aug. 19-20 weekend.

In his major World Youth Day speech the evening of Aug. 19, the pope cited Lebanon and "other countries of the Middle East" as areas plagued by "violence, terrorism and even war."

At the evening event, Lebanese in the audience waved Lebanese flags at the pope and held up a huge banner saying, "Holy Father, Lebanon counts on you."

During a brief Aug. 19 news conference aboard the papal plane flying him to Santiago de Compostela, the pope said his Aug. 15 statement expressing a desire to visit Lebanon has stimulated "a certain interest," but he had yet to receive official responses from government leaders involved in the Lebanese crisis.

"There is no response. We can speak of a certain interest," the pope said, without elaborating.

Lebanon remains "a grave problem of everyone," especially "all Christians," he said.

Joaquin Navarro-Valls, papal press spokesman, said the interest has been shown by various countries involved in the Lebanese situation, but he would not name the countries.

On Aug. 15, the pope said a genocide against Christians was taking place in Lebanon. He said he wanted to visit the Mideast country but had been told that the time was not opportune. In Vatican terminology, this usually means that security for the pope would be too risky.

Conflict at Auschwitz intensifies interfaith tensions

By Bill Pritchard
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A cardinal's decision to suspend an interfaith project at the former Nazi death camp of Auschwitz, a papal speech and Jewish protests have turned up the tension between the Catholic Church and Jewish organizations.

Meanwhile, some prominent Jewish figures counseled calm and dialogue, and France's Cardinal Albert Decourtray said the Auschwitz project must be completed as agreed upon in a Catholic-Jewish pact.

The latest twist in the Auschwitz controversy came when Cardinal Franciszek Macharski said it was impossible to continue work on an interfaith center near the camp because of a "violent campaign of accusations and defamation" against the Carmelite nuns in a convent located at Auschwitz.

"This kind of attitude and actions make the realization of the center, as I had undertaken, an impossibility," the cardinal said in his Aug. 10 statement. "In the atmosphere of aggression and disquiet sown among us, there is no way for undertaking together the building of a place dedicated to reciprocal respect."

Jewish reaction to Cardinal Macharski's statement ran from anger to concern over interfaith relations.

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, a major American figure in Catholic-Jewish dialogue, warned of turning Auschwitz into a symbol of Christian martyrdom rather than of the Holocaust which took millions of Jewish lives. But he also said Aug. 11 that he was told that Cardinal Macharski intends to continue construction once tempers have

cooled. Other reaction ranged from condemning the cardinal's statement as "brutal" to denouncing it for increasing interreligious tensions.

Rabbi Tanenbaum, a consultant with the American Jewish Committee, which he once chaired, said he fears that extremists on both sides are seizing the initiative in the controversy.

"We simply cannot let them have the field," he said.

However, the rabbi also warned that many Jews and sympathetic Christians see the Christian symbolism at the camp as signifying Auschwitz "is now being commemorated as a place essentially of Christian martyrdom."

In 1987 high-ranking Catholic and Jewish representatives forged an accord that calls for relocating 14 Carmelite nuns housed in the convent and establishing the interfaith center for education, information and prayer a short distance away from the camp. Jewish organizations had protested the convent's location at the camp proper, which they regard as the major symbol of the Holocaust that took 6 million Jewish lives.

The World Jewish Congress called Cardinal Macharski's statement "brutal and violent" and said the Vatican should take direct responsibility for carrying out the 1987 agreement.

"Silence by the Vatican on this occasion would repeat a historical tragedy," the World Jewish Congress said.

The Synagogue Council of America said protests at the convent "reflected the extent of the frustrations and disappointments

of the Jewish people."

"I look forward to the Polish Catholic authorities and other leaders of the Catholic Church fulfilling their commitment and (taking) all steps necessary to relocate the convent," said council president Rabbi Joel Zaiman.

Bronx Rabbi Avraham Weiss, one of seven American Jews beaten by Polish workers after attempting to hold a vigil on the convent grounds July 14 after scaling the convent fence, called the cardinal's statement "repugnant." He said it could lead to a "tragic rupture" in Catholic-Jewish relations.

The cardinal's statement followed weeks of escalating tension in Jewish-Catholic relations triggered by the failure to meet the Feb. 22 deadline for relocating the convent.

Cardinal Decourtray of Lyon, France, said Aug. 11 that the 1987 agreement must be honored.

"An accord commits those who sign it," he added.

On another touchy point, a major international Jewish organization asked the Vatican to clarify what it said were "unavoidably prejudicial" remarks by Pope John Paul II and said the papal comments implied the Jewish people no longer have a special bond with God.

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith said that the pope's remarks, delivered at his Aug. 2 audience, implied that the Jewish covenant with God has been superseded by the Christian covenant.

According to a Vatican text, Pope John Paul said: "The history of the Old Testament shows many instances of Israel's in-

fidelity to God. Hence God sent the prophets as his messengers to call the people to conversion, to warn them of their hardness of heart and to foretell a new covenant still to come.

"The new covenant foretold by the prophets was established through Christ's redemptive sacrifice and through the power of the Holy Spirit," the pope said.

The ADL's U.S. director, Abraham Foxman, said in a statement that he was dismayed by the pope's implication that the Jews are no longer God's "special people."

Eugene Fisher, executive secretary of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, said the ADL had made a hasty reading of what the pope said. He said the audience talk "neither asks nor answers" the question of God's fidelity to the Jewish people.

He also said that a process had been agreed upon in a meeting with the ADL in January to handle just such problems through quiet dialogue rather than by "lurching to the press release."

"We thought we had it worked out," Fisher said. The ADL should have given "the process a chance."

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