

Pope appeals for end to Lebanon's 'massacre'

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — In two documents meant to stir consciences worldwide, Pope John Paul II appealed to Catholics and Moslems to help stop what he called "the massacre of an entire people" in Lebanon.

In a three-page "appeal to all followers of Islam," the pope called for a Lebanon "free of every occupying force" and for a national reconciliation plan that recognizes all groups in Lebanese society.

"How can we believers allow ourselves to remain indifferent to a whole people which is dying before our very eyes?" asked the pope's Sept. 7 letter, which was released Sept. 26.

In an apostolic letter to all bishops, the pope said the whole church has the obligation to mobilize on behalf of Lebanese Christians. The letter, also released Sept. 26, declared: "Lebanon cannot be abandoned to isolation."

The pope called for a day of prayer for Lebanon, saying the country's disappearance as a meeting place of cultures and religions would be "one of the world's great tragedies."

He strongly reiterated his intention to visit Lebanon and "all her sons and daughters," Christian and Moslem. But Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said such a trip was impossible in the near future because recent fighting had para-

lyzed normal life and transportation there.

In both documents the pope struck a tone of alarm about the deteriorating situation in Lebanon. But he also expressed his "confidence" that violence would give way to dialogue and reconciliation.

Addressing Moslems "in the name of the same God whom we adore," the pope said 14 years of fighting had turned Lebanon into a place where "human life no longer seems to count."

Citing the teachings of justice and peace in Islam, the pope said: "Let your voices be heard, and even more, unite your efforts with those who demand for Lebanon the right to live, to live in freedom, peace and dignity."

The pope told Moslems he wanted to visit Lebanon to "venerate that land made fertile by the blood of so many innocent victims, and repeat to all Lebanese that I have confidence in them, in their ability to live together and to rebuild a country even more beautiful than the Lebanon of yesterday."

The alternative to reconciliation, he added, is "the social and economic collapse of Lebanon." In that case, he said, "all are losers" and "no one may claim to have gained."

The pope's call for an end to the occupation of Lebanon did not mention the forces of any specific nation. Syria has an estimated 40,000 troops in Lebanon and controls large sections of the country, while Israel has forces in southern Lebanon.

Navarro-Valls said the appeal to Moslems was sent to the Organization of the Islamic Conference for distribution to its 53

member states. It was written personally by the pope and translated from Polish into Arabic and other languages, he said.

In his seven-page letter to Catholic bishops, the pope stressed that Lebanon's crisis requires action and prayer by all Catholics. The church must "speak out" about the rich tradition of Christian-Moslem collaboration in Lebanon, which is now threatened, he said.

"The church must also pray," the pope said. He asked local churches to select an appropriate day for prayer for peace in Lebanon, and noted that Nov. 22 is Lebanon's National Day.

The pope said the church was seeking "no privilege" for Catholics in Lebanon, but only their right "to believe in accordance with their conscience," to "practice their religion" and "to be faithful to their cultural traditions on an equal basis with their Moslem brethren, without fear of exclusion or discrimination within the same country."

The pope also referred to his recent personal efforts on Lebanon's behalf, including a message to 15 world leaders last May, numerous public statements, and private meetings with world leaders or their representatives.

"I have not hesitated to knock at every door so that an end may be put to what must truly be called the massacre of an entire people," he said.

He said the Holy See continued to make unpublicized contacts with governments of "those countries which claim to be friends of Lebanon" to press for a viable peace process.

Blackmun: Court has votes to overturn Roe decision

STORM LAKE, Iowa (CNS) — U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun, who wrote the court's *Roe vs. Wade* decision, says the court has the votes to overturn the 1973 abortion ruling.

"The votes are there to overturn it," Blackmun told students at Buena Vista College in Storm Lake Sept. 14. "What will happen, I don't know. It may be overruled."

Blackmun said he was "surprised" the court did not overturn *Roe vs. Wade* in its July 3 ruling in a Missouri case, which gave state legislatures more authority to enact laws restricting abortions.

Blackmun dissented from the decision in *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services* and wrote a minority opinion.

Three other abortion-related cases will come before the court for the coming term, which starts in October. Blackmun told the

students he did not want to comment further because of the pending cases.

"I don't know what will happen, but it (*Roe vs. Wade*) may be overturned," he said.

Blackmun's remarks on abortion came in response to a question asked after he gave a talk on constitutional freedoms at the northwestern Iowa college. He did not discuss abortion during the talk.

It marked the second time in a year that Blackmun had suggested the court will overturn *Roe vs. Wade*.

On Sept. 13, 1988, in a speech at Little Rock, Ark., to University of Arkansas law students, Blackmun said, "The next question is, 'Will *Roe vs. Wade* go down the drain?' I think there's a very distinct possibility that it will — this term. You can count the votes."

Blackmun, 80, was appointed to the high court by President Richard Nixon in 1970.

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