

U.S. bishops view 'intifada' as cry for Mideast justice

WASHINGTON — The U.S. bishops gave more consideration to the issue of Palestinian rights in their November statement on the Middle East than in any of the hierarchy's previous documents on the region.

Nearly half of the statement's 41 pages are devoted to a discussion of a Palestinian homeland and closely related issues.

In the bishops' last statement on the Middle East, in 1978, they devoted less than a paragraph to specific mention of a homeland and other Palestinian demands.

In that document, they called for a "comprehensive political solution" of the Middle East's conflicts, which would involve "the rights of the Palestinian Arabs to participate in negotiations affecting their destiny, and to a homeland of their own."

A 1973 statement gave the issue about as much space and took essentially the same stand. It said the rights of the "Palestinian Arabs ... involves, in our view, inclusion of them as partners in any negotiations, acceptance of their right to a state" and compensation for past losses resulting from the 1948 plan which created Israel.

Both of the earlier statements were less than half the length of the current paper, which met with mixed reactions from Israeli and Arab organizations.

The document approved by the bishops at their general meeting November 9 calls for participation by Palestinians as equals in talks affecting their future. And it says the goal of such negotiations should be to "establish a Palestinian homeland with its sovereign status recognized by Israel." It doesn't say where that homeland should be.

However, the statement warns that for Palestinians "sovereign title to a territory of their own means disavowing larger claims to other territory of Israel." Neither can Israel demand "such an expansive definition of security" that its neighbors' rights are trampled, it said.

These factors appear key to prompting the bishops' new and extended inquiry into Palestinian rights and the Middle East's problems in general:

- The "intifada" or uprising of Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza, now nearly two years old. Intifada is Arabic for "shaking off" and is the Palestinians' effort to shake Israel out of the territories. The statement calls the intifada a "cry for justice."

The uprising has captured world attention and "recast the policy agenda in the Middle East," the statement says.

- Pope John Paul II's series of statements supporting a Palestinian homeland and security for Israel.

The pope "has framed a basic perspective in light of which diplomatic efforts should proceed toward a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian question," the statement says.

- New thinking on the part of the Soviet Union about its role in the Middle East, where it has long been a major arms supplier.

Moscow indicates a "willingness to play a more constructive role in the region," the statement says.

In the course of developing the statement, an ad hoc committee comprised of Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York and Archbishops Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles and William H. Keeler of Baltimore held extensive consultations with Jewish, Moslem and Christian organizations, as well as Israeli, Arab and U.S. officials.

Israeli and Arab spokesmen welcomed the final



A young resident of the Baaq'a refugee camp outside Amman, Jordan, flashes the peace sign to passing visitors.

statement, but with reservations.

Zehdi L. Terzi, the Palestine Liberation Organization's ambassador to the United Nations, gave the bishops a B-plus. Although he termed their statement "very realistic," and commended their endorsement of a Palestinian homeland with "political sovereignty," Terzi said the PLO was disappointed in the bishops' terminology. If sovereignty over a homeland is considered equivalent, Terzi said, "I would have expected them to say Palestinians should have their own state."

Israel's ambassador to the United States, Moshe Arad, denied that an independent Palestinian homeland could co-exist with secure borders for Israel. An independent Palestinian state poses a danger for Israel, he said, because "when you ask where such an entity would be established, every one of the Arabs, the Palestinians, would say in the whole area of the West Bank and the Gaza, an exact return to the pre-1967 borders."

The final version of the bishops' statement, like the pope's pronouncements, does not suggest boundaries or a location for the Palestinian homeland. However, an earlier draft very clearly placed a "sovereign entity" in the Israeli-occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza.

The previous draft says the conclusion to be drawn from a discussion of Palestinian rights "is as clear as it has been controversial: Palestinian representation in Middle East negotiations leading to a sovereign Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza."

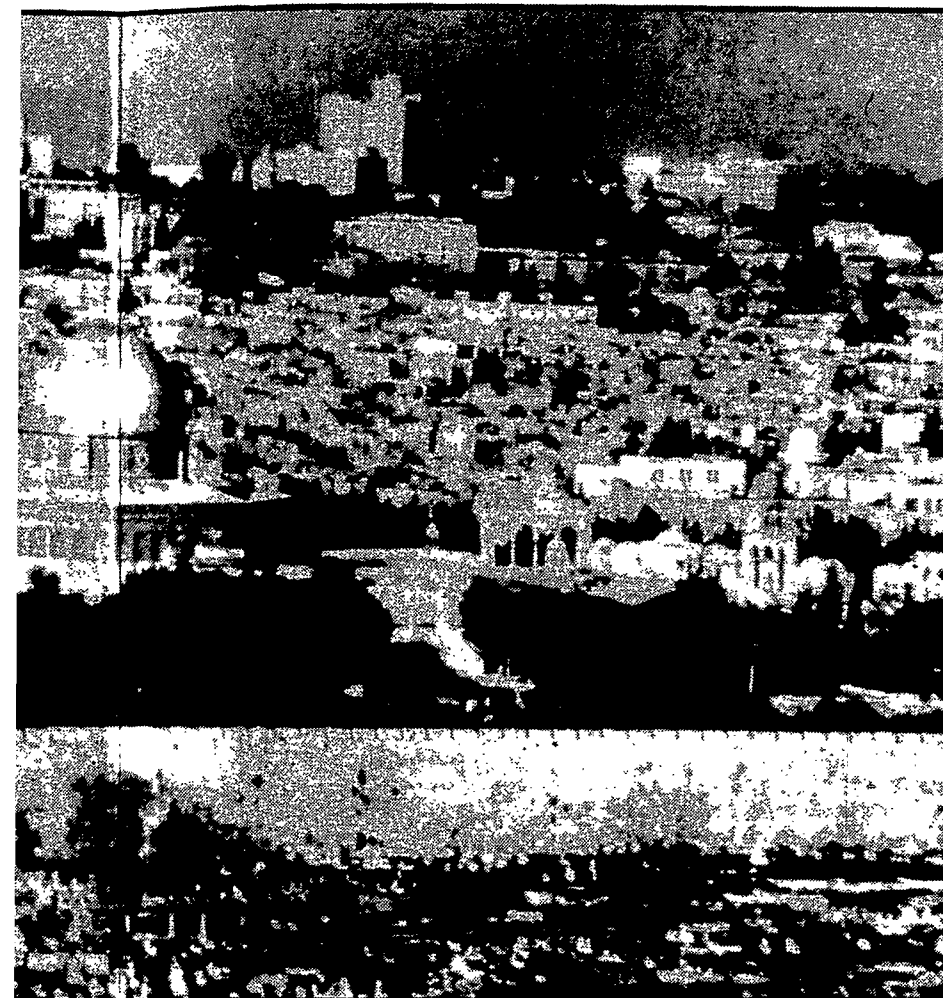
Israeli settler groups have been establishing communities in the territories, with their government's blessing, in an effort to ensure Israel will stay.

Turning to the Lebanese theater of the turbulent Middle East, the statement says internal conflicts and external influences have pushed the country to virtual extinction as an independent state.

Lebanon "has become the battleground of the region," it says. "The external causes of Lebanon's conflict are essentially the projection of the major rivalries of the Middle East into Lebanon."

It calls Syria, which maintains upward of 40,000 troops in Lebanon in alliance with various Moslem militias, an "occupying power." It says the "li-

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Photos courtesy of Rod Saunders

Moslems, Christians and Jews. Overlooking the Western Wall, a Moslem temple said to mark the site where Abraham nearly sacrificed



Constantine I in the fourth century, Bethlehem's Basilica of the Nativity is the cave where Jesus was born. Today, Bethlehem is occupied by Is-

and surrounded by new Jewish settlements.

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