

Pope says political change poses challenges to peace

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The political and social transformations taking place in Eastern Europe are positive developments, but pose new challenges to world peace, Pope John Paul II said Jan. 13 in a major speech to diplomats.

These challenges include encouraging the politically and economically advanced nations of Western Europe to help their less-fortunate neighbors and to develop a stable Europe in which the ethnic and nationalistic rivalries of the past do not explode into violence, the pope said.

Almost half of the pope's Jan. 13 speech to Vatican-accredited diplomats concerned the 1989 "happy evolution" in Eastern Europe, which loosened the post-World War II communist domination of the region.

The pope also asked for an end to the "second-class" status of Catholics in many Islamic countries, criticized China's repression of student dissidents, renewed his calls for a sovereign Lebanon, and asked for Palestinian-Israeli negotiations to resolve the status of the Israeli-occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He did not take a stand on whether the Palestine Liberation Organization should be represented in such negotiations.

The pope used his annual January speech to diplomats to outline major international issues of concern to the Vatican.

Regarding Eastern Europe, "the irrepressible thirst for liberty" has caused "walls to crumble and doors to open," he



Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (right) engages in animated conversation with residents of Vilnius, Lithuania, Thursday, Jan. 11. Gorbachev visited the Lithuanian capital in an effort to stall the local communist party's drive for complete independence.

said. The Soviet Union and the other Eastern European countries have become "stops on the pilgrimage to freedom," he said.

"The year 1989 could well signal the decline of what has been called 'the Cold War,' of the division of Europe and the world in two ideologically opposed camps,

of the uncontrolled arms race and of the communist world locked up in a closed society," the pope added.

"The new climate which progressively is being installed in Europe favors substantial progress in negotiations for nuclear, chemical and conventional disarmament," he said.

The changes are also positive for super-power relations, causing the United States and the Soviet Union to become "partners in dialogue and in peace," he said.

The pope said his contacts with U.S. and Soviet leaders "have assured me of their desire to place international relations on a more secure foundation and to regard each other even more as partners instead of competitors."

But the changes also provide challenges so that Europe develops as a peaceful "community of nations," he said.

"Secular rivalries may re-emerge, conflicts between ethnic minorities may become inflamed anew and nationalism may be exacerbated," he added.

"The time has come for Europeans of the West, who have the advantage of achieving freedom and prosperity years ago, to aid their brothers of Central and Eastern Europe," he said.

"The time is ripe to reassemble the stones of the battered walls and construct together our common house" based upon the "spiritual roots which have made Europe," said the Polish-born pope.

Such spiritual rebirth will require changes in Western Europe, which often has forgotten religious values, he added.

"One can only regret the deliberate absence of all transcendent moral references in the governing of so-called 'developed' societies," he said.

The pope criticized "the presence and spread of countervalues such as selfishness, hedonism, racism and practical materialism."

The Europe of the future should be based on the 1975 Helsinki Accords, he said. The accords pledge to foster human rights and increasing economic and political cooperation between Eastern and Western Europe as ways of stabilizing peace.

The pope also said he "could not let pass in silence the worrying situation in which Christians find themselves in certain countries where the Islamic religion is in the majority."

Czech government grants new rights

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Czechoslovakia's new coalition government has formally agreed to reinstate full religious freedom and halt "any type of surveillance" over priests and bishops.

The step raises the prospects of state financing of church activities, religious education in public schools, and reopening of seminaries, said Karel Hais, a government official who will deal with church affairs. His statement was reported Jan. 12 by Vatican Radio.

The same day, the Vatican's special envoy to Eastern Europe, Archbishop Francesco Colasuonno, traveled to Czechoslovakia for talks with officials of the new non-communist government.

Archbishop Colasuonno was believed to be trying to accelerate negotiations for the naming of bishops for five Czechoslovakian dioceses. He was also expected to discuss a possible visit by Pope John Paul II to the East European nation.

"The new government is very interested in the rebirth of religious life, and we will study as soon as possible how to reintroduce religious education in the schools," Hais said.

Pope's Mexican tour cut down; Tabasco visit set

By Mike Tangeman
Catholic News Service

MEXICO CITY — Vatican and Mexican church officials have announced that Pope John Paul II's visit to Mexico in May has been scaled down, partly because the original itinerary would have been too hectic.

The Vatican's delegate to Mexico said the pope's health is "no longer as excellent" as it was during his 1979 visit to the country. But a papal trip planner denied that the pontiff's stamina has slipped.

In August, Mexican church officials announced that they had proposed to Vatican officials an 18-city tour during the May 6-13 visit. But church officials reduced the scale of the papal trip following consultations in November between Mexican church officials and a special Vatican envoy, Jesuit Father Roberto Tucci, who is

charged with reviewing the itinerary.

During a Dec. 22 press conference, church officials announced that the pope will visit 12 dioceses, including the greater Mexico City metropolitan area and Mexico's northern industrial city of Monterrey. On May 7, Pope John Paul is to meet with Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari in the Los Pinos presidential residence.

Rochester's sister diocese of Tabasco is slated for a papal visit on May 11, when the pope is to visit the town of Villahermosa and bless Tabasco's new diocesan cathedral. The trip now excludes stops in cities near the U.S. border and in the staunchly Catholic archdioceses of Puebla de los Angeles and Guadalajara, Mexico's second largest city.

The Vatican's delegate to Mexico,

Archbishop Girolamo Prigione, told reporters at the Dec. 22 press conference that part of the reason for the revised schedule is that the pope cannot take a marathon visit like his first trip to Mexico in January 1979.

"Although the pope enjoys good health, it is no longer excellent as it was on his first visit," Archbishop Prigione said. Vatican officials have also requested that the pope's daily itinerary end by 10 p.m., he said.

Pope John Paul will turn 70 on May 18.

At the Vatican Dec. 28, however, an official involved in the planning of papal trips said the Mexican visit had been scaled down to conform to other papal trips, not because the pope had lost his traveling stamina.

The proposed program for the 1990 visit was far too hectic, the official said.

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