



STUDENTS FLEE SHELLING — Students run for cover in Moslem west Beirut Wednesday, Jan. 31, as stray shells land in the nearby Hamra commercial area. Gen. Michel Aoun's Christian soldiers are battling the Lebanese Forces militia for control of Beirut's Christian zone.

Interfaith center, convent being built near Auschwitz

OSWIECIM, Poland (CNS) — A Polish government minister and a Catholic cardinal broke ground to start construction of a long-awaited interfaith prayer center near the former Nazi death camp of Auschwitz.

The center will include a new convent for Carmelite nuns, whose present home beside the camp walls caused a bitter dispute between international Jewish organizations and the Catholic Church.

Cardinal Franciszek Macharski of Krakow, the Polish archdiocese that includes Auschwitz, opened the Feb. 19 ceremony with Jacek Ambroziak, head of Poland's Council of Ministers' office.

Ambroziak represented Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who was due to have talks in Warsaw Feb. 23 with Edgar Bronfman, president of the New York-based World Jewish Congress.

No Jewish representatives were among the 20 people at the ceremony.

The center will consist of a meeting hall, a hostel and a new convent. The site is one mile from the present convent — a former theater where the Nazis once stored the gas used to kill as many as 4 million people,

most of them Jews, at the camp.

Jewish organizations protested the presence of the convent at the site and were outraged by the church's failure to honor a 1987 agreement to move it by February 1989. In July, several American Jews tried to scale the fence at the convent, but were beaten back by Polish workers.

Remarks about the incident by Cardinal Jozef Glemp of Gniezno and Warsaw were criticized as anti-Semitic and fueled the controversy. The cardinal also said he thought the 1987 accord should be renegotiated and the nuns should not be forced to leave.

In September, the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews said the Holy See would help fund the new interfaith center. It said the Vatican remained "convinced that such a center will contribute significantly to the development of good relations between Christians and Jews."

A few days later, Cardinal Glemp switched his position, saying he supported the 1987 agreement and that it was "essential" for the convent to be moved.

Nicaraguan cardinal anticipates election

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Nicaraguan Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo has said he hopes the nation's Feb. 25 elections do not serve as a pretext for a U.S. invasion, Vatican Radio reported.

The cardinal made his remarks in a speech this month at a Catholic university in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

"In the case of an invasion, the deaths

could be hundreds of thousands.

The elections will pit President Daniel Ortega of the ruling Sandinista Party against Violeta Chamorro of the U.S.-backed National Opposition Union.

The National Opposition Union has alleged that Sandinista supporters have intimidated many of its poll-watchers into resigning.

Census

Continued from page 6

Preliminary census statistics for 1980-89 show a 39-percent increase in the Hispanic population nationwide — indicating a population increase five times greater than that of non-Hispanics.

Together, three states encompass eight out of every 10 U.S. residents of Mexican heritage. Projections for those states show that by 1990 a 55-percent increase will have occurred among Hispanics in Texas and Arizona, and a 73-percent increase in California.

Those three states stand to gain as many as 10 new congressional seats in the reapportionment process to follow the 1990 census, according to the Southwest Voter Research Institute in San Antonio.

Such high stakes stir controversy. Nearly 40 lawsuits were filed to contest the way the census was conducted in 1980.

A House and Senate conference committee agreed in October to include illegal aliens counted in the 1990 census for the process of congressional redistricting. The move to bar illegal aliens had been initiated by northern states that stand to lose congressional seats.

Father Nicanor Lobato, director of the Spanish-Speaking Apostolate of the Diocese of Venice, Fla., said Feb. 8 that many undocumented migrant workers in his dioceses are reluctant to fill out census forms for fear the action will lead to deportation.

To alert newcomers to the existence of the census and assuage any fears, the Census Bureau has taken to the airwaves in Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Cambodian and Thai. Radio and TV messages assure recent immigrants that information collected will be kept confidential.

"We don't even ask for Social Security numbers," Bancroft told CNS.

To encourage participation, the Census Bureau plans to send out "suggested homilies" to be used by priests, ministers and rabbis during religious services, said Cortez.

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