

Pope calls for international aid to Africa

By John Thavis

Catholic News Service

DAR ES SALAAM, Tanzania — While visiting Africa for the seventh time, Pope John Paul II urged the international community to make a "supreme effort" in helping the millions of AIDS victims and refugees on the continent.

In Tanzania Sept. 1-3, the pope praised the rapidly growing local church for its ministry to the sick and needy and for its overall spiritual vitality. He ordained 43 new priests and told bishops their pastoral future was "rich in promise."

The pope also sought to solidify the generally good Catholic-Muslim relations in Tanzania, telling Islamic representatives that the two religions should be "partners" in building a better society.

The mixed Christian and Muslim population gave the pope a warm, polite welcome. Tens of thousands of people stood for hours along the pope's motorcade routes and cheered when the pontiff rode by in an open Rolls-Royce.

It was the pope's first visit to Tanzania and the first leg of a journey that was to include Burundi, Rwanda and the Ivory

Coast.

A few hours after he arrived in the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam, the pope raised the issue of AIDS in stark terms when he spoke to a group of diplomats.

"The drama of AIDS threatens not just some nations or societies, but the whole of humanity. It knows no frontiers of geography, race, age or social condition," the pope said.

The disease brings a "unique cultural unease" because in it "the life-giving functions of human sexuality, and the blood which epitomizes health and life itself, have become a roadway to death," he said.

The AIDS epidemic calls for a "supreme effort of international cooperation," the pope said.

The threat is so great, he added, that any indifference by public authorities, "condemnatory or discriminatory practices" towards AIDS victims or "self-interested rivalries" in the search for a cure should be considered "forms of collaboration in this terrible evil."

The pope's remarks had special relevance in Africa, which is home to about two-thirds of the world's AIDS victims.

The World Health Organization recently estimated that about 500,000 Africans, most of them between the ages of 16 and 29, suffer from AIDS. An estimated 5 million Africans carry the AIDS-causing HIV virus, and 30 percent of them are expected to develop AIDS in the next few years.

Tanzania has one of the worst rates of AIDS in Africa. The day before the pope arrived, the government announced that some 10,000 children had been left orphans by AIDS in one northern province.

While addressing the diplomats, the pope said the church would help promote prevention of AIDS, but always in a context of moral responsibility. In a reference to condoms, which are not readily available in East Africa, the pope criticized campaigns that give a sense of "false security" and promote "the very patterns of behavior which have greatly contributed to the spread of the disease."

In pleading the cause of African refugees, the pope said their plight "has a weaker hold on worldwide public opinion than many other causes," yet is a dramatic, ongoing crisis.

The continent holds some 5 million refugees and 13 million displaced people, most of them "innocent victims of ethnic conflict, power struggles or of failed development policies," he said.

The pope had praise for Tanzania's "resolute efforts" to build a just society in 30 years of independence. He also said that solving Africa's massive social problems was ultimately linked to the "democratization" of African life.



File photo
Care for the sick has been the theme of the first leg of Pope John Paul II's pastoral visit to Africa.

Tanzania, with Nyerere's support, is making tentative steps toward political pluralism but still maintains a one-party state.

On Sept. 3 the pope traversed Tanzania, stopping in the southern Catholic region of Songea before traveling to Mwanza, on the shores of Lake Victoria in the north.

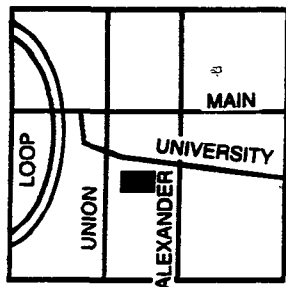
At a Mass in Songea, the pope lamented the "failure of development" in Africa and linked it with "a selfish desire for profit and the thirst for power."

He said he sympathized with young Africans who were losing hope — especially because they must live amidst malnutrition, poverty, inadequate education and health care, a lack of jobs and rampant corruption.

But the pope urged youths not to give up. Borrowing an image from the Book of Genesis, he said the continent's daily frustrations recalled the "original chaos"

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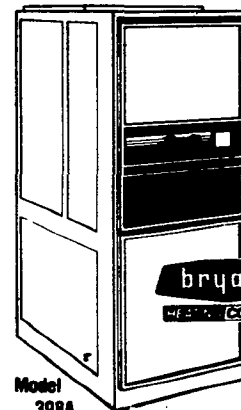
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