

Bishops emphasize concern for Iraqi citizens

WASHINGTON — In separate statements released last week, three U.S. bishops reminded U.S. Catholics of ethical issues related to U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf.

Archbishop Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Policy, said Iraqi civilians must not be deprived of food or medicine as a result of implementation of the U.N. economic sanctions against Iraq.

In a Sept. 12 letter to Secretary of State James Baker, Archbishop Mahony said the U.S. bishops agreed with President Bush's "clear assertion that our enemy is (Iraqi President) Saddam Hussein — not the Iraqi people."

He said the bishops back the embargo against Iraq but urge that "utmost care and sensitivity be exercised so that innocent civilians" are not deprived of life's basics. A copy of the letter was released by the U.S. Catholic Conference in Washington in mid-September.

In a Sept. 10 statement sent to priests of his archdiocese, Archbishop Charles A. Salatka of Oklahoma City urged Catholics to "guard the truth," which he said often "takes a beating" in wartime.

During wars and times of preparation for war, the enemy nation is frequently "painted in grotesque shapes," "wild rumors" are circulated and "ethnic groups, in the present case, Arabs, are insultingly treated in the various media as well as in everyday conversations," he said.

Iraq invaded and annexed Kuwait in August, prompting a massive U.S.-led military buildup in Saudi Arabia and other countries. Iraq's holding of some foreign civilians as potential shields against attack has been denounced worldwide.

Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco asked Catholics to pray both for Bush and for Hussein, "that through conversion of heart (Hussein), too, may become an instrument of peace."

In a Sept. 20 statement on the "many questions of conscience" raised by the Persian Gulf crisis, Archbishop Quinn described the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as "morally indefensible" and said the use of "human shields" against possible military attack "violates the norms of morality and violates international law."

In addition, he said, "the use of chemical and nuclear weapons must be firmly rejected by all sides as immoral because of the necessary danger they constitute for innocent civilians and because of their very nature their effects go beyond human control."

Algeria's bishops, too, appealed for peace in the Persian Gulf and said civilians should not be used as political and military pawns, Vatican Radio reported.

In a statement published Sept. 15, the bishops said it was important that "the dynamism of peace replace the logic of war" in the troubled region.

They defended the right of populations to self-determination and said human rights are violated "when people are used as bargaining tools in political and military negotiations."

Algeria is an oil-producing North African country where Christians are a tiny minority. Most of the population is Muslim, and Islam is the state religion.

Meanwhile, staffers at Catholic Relief Services, the Baltimore-based U.S. bishops' overseas relief and development agency, were continuing to monitor the circumstances of Iraqi and Kuwaiti refugees living in Jordan because of the Persian Gulf crisis.

A five-member fact-finding delegation visited Amman, Jordan, Sept. 8-16 and found "adequate food, water and shelter" at the Jordanian refugee camps.

"But the situation could change very quickly" if there were a new influx of refugees, said Doug Broderick, CRS assistant desk officer for Eurasia and a member

of the delegation.

Broderick and four members of CRS' Egypt-based staff spent a week visiting the Jordanian refugee camps. He said that during that period, the camps' population declined from 70,000 to 40,000 because of the transfer of refugees back to their home countries. The Shaalan I camp, which once housed more than 45,000 refugees, was closed during the CRS team's tour.

As the refugees leave, the Catholic agency's emphasis will turn to assistance in the home countries, especially Egypt, Pakistan, India, the Philippines and Bangladesh, Broderick told Catholic News Service.

Among U.S. citizens happy to be back on U.S. soil was Joan Hoehn Khaja, who was trapped in Kuwait City at the time of the Aug. 2 Iraqi invasion along with her two children, whom she had taken to visit her in-laws.

Healthy and expecting her third child in November, Khaja is back home in New

Harmony, in the Diocese of Evansville, Ind., after a month of uncertain danger in Kuwait.

She and her children left Kuwait earlier in September as part of a flight of 147 women and children offered by the Iraqi government. Unlike most others on the flight, Khaja stayed in London so doctors could monitor her pregnancy.

Khaja, a Catholic, is married to Muhammad Khaja, a Kuwaiti citizen who had not accompanied the family on the trip to Kuwait. Khaja, who did not comment during his family's monthlong stay under Iraqi occupation, is seeking American citizenship and could not leave the United States.

According to the International Organization for Migration, based in Geneva, 500,000 foreigners are still attempting to leave Iraq. As of Sept. 20, about 1,500 Americans had been allowed to leave Iraq and Kuwait on seven chartered flights, but about 1,000 more remained behind.

Acting director named for diocesan division

ROCHESTER — Brother Luis Ruberté, H.Ch., was recently named acting director of the diocesan Division of Urban Services.

Rebecca Gifford, the director of the division, began a study leave in California on Sept. 4. The division coordinates diocesan services to urban parishes.

Brother Ruberté has served as director of the diocesan Office of the Spanish Apostolate since 1980.

As director of the Spanish Apostolate, he is responsible for overseeing ministry development among Hispanic Catholics, as well as outreach through the Spanish apostolate office on Clinton Avenue.

He is a graduate of the University of Ponce, Puerto Rico.

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