

Pope, bishops plead for Middle East peace

WASHINGTON (CNS) — While the machinery of governments moved to prepare for — and avoid — a war in the Persian Gulf, the moral machinery of religious leaders continued to counsel against war and for ways to seek peace.

As the United Nations' Jan. 15 deadline neared for Iraq to pull out of Kuwait, Pope John Paul II repeatedly called for peace.

The *Washington Post* reported the Bush administration has ruled out using nuclear weapons against Iraq, but Latin-rite Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem said armed conflict in the gulf would be "a world, universal war, with atomic and chemical weapons."

A papal message to foreign ministers of the 12-member European Economic Community asked that "peaceful means such as dialogue and negotiations prevail over recourse to devastating and terrifying instruments of death." The Vatican released the text of the message Jan. 5.

On Jan. 1, which the church marks as the World Day of Peace, the pope delivered an emotional plea during an Angelus blessing.

"With heartfelt sentiments my thoughts turn to the Middle East, in the hope that 1991 will be for all people a year of peace and not war," he said.

On Christmas Day, the pontiff called for a peaceful solution to the crisis and warned that a war in the gulf would be "an adventure with no return."

Vatican Radio reported that the Catholic bishops of 12 European Economic Community nations issued a joint statement Jan. 4 asking for a vast prayer movement in support of pope's peace appeals for the gulf.

"May the light and strength which comes from the spirit of God illuminate and accompany government leaders, so that every day they are dedicated to preserving peace and promoting justice," said the bishops.

The notion of the Vatican steering diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis was ad-

vanced by former Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, in an interview in a Rome newspaper Dec. 30.

Cardinal Casaroli said the world "urgently" needs an independent mediator in the crisis. "I see no other way, no better way, to escape the blind alley in which dialogue seems to have landed," he said.

Although Vatican sources said Cardinal Casaroli's remarks were made in a private capacity, an Iraqi official suggested the Vatican would make a good mediator in the Persian Gulf crisis.

"We respect the Vatican's point of view on this, and the fact that they are ready to do something. We especially appreciate the Vatican's position that there is a relationship between all the problems in the Middle East, and that a solution must deal with all of them," Salih Al-Karkhi, spokesman for the Iraqi Embassy in Italy, said Jan. 4.

The Vatican said in late December it was not involved in any such diplomatic initiative, and U.S. officials have rejected linking other Middle East disputes to the Persian Gulf crisis.

U.S. bishops repeated the calls for peace as the Iraqi pullout deadline neared.

In a statement issued Jan. 1, Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago said Pope Paul VI's 1965 plea of "No more war! War never again!" delivered at the United Nations "must be the rallying cry of today."

In a New Year's Eve letter to President Bush and member of Congress, Bishop Michael H. Kenny of Juneau, Alaska, asked that if war is waged to liberate Kuwait, "will we not be 'burning the village to save the village?'"

Nine Southern California religious leaders, among them Los Angeles Archbishop Roger M. Mahony, said in a Jan. 2 statement, "We do not — and cannot — accept military aggression by one nation against the other."

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AP/Wide World Photos
NO ROOM AT THE INN — Father Gerald Kuhn, right, of St. Brigid's Church, in lower Manhattan, leads a march through Tompkins Square Park Dec. 23, depicting Mary and Joseph seeking shelter. It was part of a Christmas pageant staged by Father Kuhn, and it is a story he hears every day in real life as a pastor of a church that sits across the street from one of the city's largest encampments of homeless people. Mary and Joseph are portrayed by Magdalia and Edwin Torres.

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