

# War fears fuel opposition

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A war in the Persian Gulf could be the first U.S. military engagement in this century to win prior authorization from Congress but opposition from much of the nation's religious leadership.

As the final days of deadlocked diplomacy wound down and Congress passed a resolution approving use of military force if needed to drive Iraq out of Kuwait, a chorus of voices rose at home and abroad urging the president to wait for international sanctions to work.

Across the country prayer vigils for peace were held in the days before the Jan. 15 deadline for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

Pope John Paul II called Jan. 13 for an

international "peace conference contributing to the resolution of all the problems of living peacefully in the Middle East.

"Save humanity the tragic experience of a new war," he urged at his Sunday Angelus talk in St. Peter's Square.

"A war would not resolve the problems, only aggravate them," he said. "How many civilians, how many babies, how many women, how many elderly people would be innocent victims?"

Christian leaders of the Holy Land issued a plea Jan. 13 to President Bush and U.N. General Secretary Javier Perez de Cuellar, urging them "to avoid war, to save human lives, to promote a just solution to all the causes of conflict in the Middle East."

In a letter sent Jan. 7 and made public

Jan. 11 — the day before Congress authorized warfare if needed — Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis warned each member of Congress that "a resort to offensive military action ... could well violate traditional moral criteria" that must be met for a just war.

Archbishop Roach is chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Policy, the leading agency on war, peace and other international issues within the U.S. Catholic Conference, the bishops' national public policy arm.

"The fundamental moral challenge," Archbishop Roach wrote, is "to mobilize effectively the political will, diplomatic skill and economic strength to resist and reverse Iraq's aggression by peaceful but determined means."

On Jan. 10 chief executives of many of

America's Protestant and Orthodox churches endorsed a letter to Congress declaring "our opposition to U.S. offensive military action" and urging the lawmakers to give sanctions "ample opportunity to take effect" before crossing the line to war.

The letter they endorsed was written by National Council of Churches president, Father Leonid Kishkovsky of the Orthodox Church in America, and James A. Hamilton, NCC general secretary. It reiterated NCC's prior condemnation of the Iraqi invasion, but rejected warfare as a solution. The NCC has called instead for continued use of the international sanctions and for diplomacy within a U.N. framework to resolve the "longstanding issues" behind conflict in the Middle East.

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## CATHOLIC COURIER

Diocese of Rochester Thursday, January 17, 1991 50¢ 20 pages

### Catholics abroad long for religious freedom

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

A little less than a month ago, U.S. Catholics engaged in an act that might be considered a massive revolt in some countries.

They openly exchanged Christmas cards.

Paulius Klimas, a first-generation Lithuanian American Catholic, noted that one of his friends in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius was afraid to write "Merry Christmas" on his holiday cards in years past. The reason for his friend's fear? The inscription might unduly have exposed the sender's Catholic faith to Soviet authorities bent on repressing it.

Thanks to a new Soviet law guaranteeing religious freedom, however, Klimas' friend this year decided to forgo his usual "Happy New Year" greeting and instead write "Merry Christmas" on a postcard.

"To some, it's no big deal," Klimas, a Rochester resident, said. "But it's a very big deal."

Indeed, practicing one's Catholic faith is a "very big deal" in countries dominated by atheistic, non-Christian, or militaristic regimes throughout the world.

Right-wing dictatorships in Latin America have sometimes imprisoned or repressed Catholics, not so much for receiving the sacraments as for speaking out on human rights or working with the poor.

In the Hindu kingdom of Nepal, Catholics — and even more so, Protestants — are seen as potentially disruptive of national unity and as harboring "foreign" influences.

Such Islamic countries as Egypt and Turkey recently have seen Muslim extremists murder and persecute Christians of various denominations.

Yet in many communist nations trumpeting militant atheism, Catholics have often been suppressed for merely openly talking about God — which can be interpreted by authorities as "counterrevolutionary activity."

Whatever the reason, the Catholic Church is not high on the popularity charts of most of the world's repressive governments. What is it about the church that so often makes it a target of persecution?

According to one veteran observer of religious repression, governments often see the church as a competing power center. In many countries, the church serves as the focal point of anti-government dissidence, commented Father Stan DeBoe, a Trinitarian priest and a human-rights expert at the Institute of Religion and Democracy, based in Washington, D.C.

Noting, for example, that Catholics have played a leading role in the recent changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Father DeBoe pointed out that the church was and is a bastion of nationalism in such nations as Poland and in the Soviet republics of Ukraine and Lithuania.

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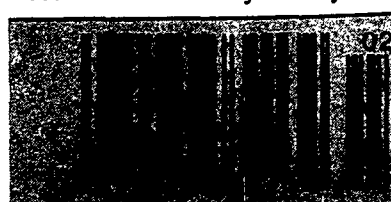
AP/Wide World Photos  
An Albanian kisses a statue of Jesus Dec. 25 during the first Christmas midnight Mass to be celebrated in Shkodra, Albania, in the 23 years since the implementation of a Stalinist ban on religious activity.



File photo  
A Chinese woman prays at a 1979 Sunday Mass at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Beijing.



File photo  
People carry crosses during a torch-light parade in San Salvador Nov. 16 to mark the anniversary of the killing of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter.

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