

Vatican calls summit on postwar problems

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — As allied and Iraqi officials established a cease-fire in the Persian Gulf, religious leaders focused on the complex postwar problems that must be resolved to bring lasting peace to the region.

Religious leaders' primary concerns in the wake of the devastating gulf war included:

- Humanitarian aid to refugees and hundreds of thousands of Kuwaitis and Iraqis suffering from the destruction of the war.
- Worldwide Christian-Muslim reconciliation to overcome the religious enmities provoked by the war.
- Resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the conflict in Lebanon.
- More equitable sharing of wealth throughout the Middle East.
- Prevention of a new arms race, both in the Middle East and around the world, as nations begin to vie for the sophisticated Western weapons systems that completely overwhelmed Iraq's military power.

In his Angelus talk March 3, Pope John Paul II called for solidarity with all the suffering people of the Middle East and a postwar policy toward Iraq that would permit it to embark on a path of "loyal cooperation with its neighbors and with other members of the international community."

The pope began setting international Catholic plans for postwar reconciliation and reconstruction by convoking a March 4-5 Vatican summit of top church leaders from the Vatican, the Middle East and key Western nations in the allied coalition.

In his opening talk at the summit, the pope said the Catholic Church — which has only a small minority population in the Middle East and almost no direct political influence in the region — must respond "as a community of charity" to the devastation and divisions of the war.

He said the church will work for "a just and durable peace" by urging resolution of the underlying causes of the region's turmoil.

Among pressing Middle Eastern problems to be resolved, he said, are the rights of Israel, Lebanon and the Palestinians; relief of foreign debt burdens; arms control and disarmament; international security guarantees; and dialogue and mutual respect among Christians, Muslims and

Jews.

Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, in charge of Vatican relations with governments, said the church would take a two-pronged approach to postwar reconstruction: fostering massive aid programs for the war's victims and engaging in diplomatic activity to promote negotiated solutions to the region's problems.

Before the summit opened, U.S. and Middle Eastern Catholic leaders focused on the same issues summarized by the pope.

In a session with reporters in Rome March 3, several Middle Eastern patriarchs and a leading North African archbishop called to the summit said that building a lasting peace in the region must include a solution to the Palestinian question, restoration of trust between the Arabs and the West, and aid to the Iraqi victims of the war.

Iraqi Chaldean Patriarch Raphael I Bidawid described the massive allied air assault on Iraq as "genocide" and said his people are in dire need of aid.

"The economic needs are enormous ... The infrastructure of the entire country has been completely annihilated. We have no water, no electricity and no gas for cooking — even food is lacking," he said.

Archbishop Henri Teissier of Algiers, Algeria, president of the North African Regional Bishops' Conference, said the deep anti-Western attitudes that the war has provoked among Arabs and Muslims seriously threaten Christian-Muslim relations.

Church leaders must show by their witness that the causes of the war were political and economic, not religious, he said.

While the ground war was still under way Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis, in a major speech in Washington as chairman of the U.S. bishops' International Policy Committee, described the shaping of a lasting peace in the Middle East as "far more difficult than winning a war."

At a thanksgiving Mass in the nation's capital Feb. 28, Cardinal James A. Hickey of Washington said, "Now that war is over, the peace must yet be won by addressing injustice, by seeking multilateral disarmament, by helping all peoples of the region to live a life worthy of their God-given dignity."

Contributing to this story were Agostino Bono and John Thavis in Rome.



AP/Wide World Photos
Al Kozakiwicz (left), 23, of Buffalo cries after learning that a fellow tank crewman in the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division had been killed in the battle of the Euphrates Valley Feb. 27. Injured in the battle was Michael Santarakis (center), 21, of Queens. The casualties occurred when a mortar of undetermined origin struck the crewmen's tank.

Church leaders dismayed by plan to issue condoms

By Tracy Early
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Catholic leaders in New York expressed dismay at the City Board of Education's 4-3 vote on Feb. 27 to approve distribution of condoms to public high school students on request.

Schools Chancellor Joseph A. Fernandez proposed and fought for the plan as a way to limit the spread of AIDS. He was supported by Mayor David N. Dinkins.

"I feel very sad about the vote," said Bishop Thomas V. Daily of Brooklyn. "At the same time, however, I want to commend the three members of the board who had the courage to vote their convictions and witness their stand for morality in public schools."

Bishop Daily quoted from a statement by Pope John Paul II on the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II: "The fact is that public life cannot bypass ethical criteria."

The Brooklyn bishop said he would collaborate with Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York to "do what I can ... with whatever resources are available to change this policy on condoms now voted, and restore the educational system to the

observance of proper moral values."

In a brief telephone interview, Bishop Daily said he was exploring the possibility of legal action.

While the Board of Education was meeting at its headquarters, which are in Brooklyn, Bishop Daily led about 100 people in a prayer vigil outside.

Cardinal O'Connor was in Rome when the vote was taken, and his staff aide who led the battle against the condom plan, Monsignor John G. Woolsey, was not available for comment.

Catherine Hickey, superintendent of New York archdiocesan elementary and secondary schools, said schools of the archdiocese had an AIDS education program, as mandated by the state, but that it was taught in accordance with Catholic morality and emphasized such principles as abstinence and self-respect.

John P. Puthenveetil, director of the New York chapter of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, said the league opposed the city program because it violated parental rights. Under the city plan, students can obtain condoms from their schools without parental approval.



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