

# Pontiff calls on world to end Kurdish crisis

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Kurdish people face extinction unless world leaders intervene to find "a just and adequate solution," Pope John Paul II said following the Iraqi government's bloody suppression of a Kurdish revolt.

"Not only do thousands of babies, women and elderly people risk dying of cold and hunger, but the very survival of the entire community has been put in danger," the pope said.

"The invocation for help by so many innocent people must not go unheard," he said April 7 during his midday "Regina Coeli" talk from his balcony window overlooking St. Peter's Square. The Regina Coeli is the church's midday prayer during the time leading to Pentecost.

Below the pope's window, several Kurds waved Iraqi flags.

The pope appealed to leaders of governments and "all those who have at heart the fate of peoples so that a remedy is found for such a tragedy."

The pope's call followed the official condemnation by the U.N. Security Council of Iraq's repression. At least 300,000 Kurds had escaped to neighboring Turkey and Iran, and news reports from the area indicated that as many as 1 million more were trying to escape over treacherous terrain under threat of Iraqi attack.

The U.N. resolution did not call for punitive action in case of Iraqi non-compliance.

Iraq has proposed a partial amnesty for Kurds, but Kurdish opposition leaders abroad have rejected it.

Kurds are an ethnic minority in Iraq and the neighboring countries of Syria, Turkey and Iran.

They began an armed revolt in northern Iraq against President Saddam Hussein after Iraq lost the Persian Gulf War to a U.S.-led coalition.

The United States and other coalition members have begun dropping relief supplies to the Kurds from airplanes, but have

said they will not militarily support the rebellion.

The pope's April 7 talk also appealed for the release of hostages held in the Middle East and asked aid for people suffering because of the civil wars in Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia.

In Lebanon and Iraq, "for years numerous persons have been held in prisons, without any news about them," said the pope.

On April 8, a Vatican official issued a new appeal for humanitarian aid in the wake of the Kurdish exodus from Iraq.

Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, who heads a newly formed Vatican relief committee for the Middle East, said the Kurdish refugees were in urgent need of help, and urged people to give generously to relief organizations working in the area.



AP/Wide World Photos

A row of trucks carries Kurdish refugees from Iraq in Turkey's Cukurca township April 4. More than 2 million Kurdish refugees were reported fleeing north and east from Kurdish-held cities recaptured by Iraqi forces during the past week. Although Turkey has closed its borders to refugees, some have managed to slip into the country.

# Queen's sainthood cause suspended

By Agostino Bono  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican Congregation for Sainthood Causes has temporarily suspended action on the controversial case of 15th-century Queen Isabella of Spain pending further historical research into her life, said Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls.

Although the queen's cause has yet to reach the first stage of the three-step process to sainthood, Jewish groups have opposed honoring her, saying her rule was marked by persecutions of Jews and Muslims.

Navarro-Valls had no comment when asked if the suspension was the result of the criticisms.

"There is a momentary suspension to deepen the historical investigation of the

case," Navarro-Valls told Catholic News Service April 3.

Rabbi Leon Klenicki, interfaith affairs director for the Anti-Defamation League in New York, told CNS April 2 that he had been informed of the decision on Queen Isabella during a phone call from the Vatican. He did not say who had called him.

In an earlier letter to Archbishop Edward Cassidy, head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rabbi Klenicki strongly opposed any move by the Vatican to honor Queen Isabella, saying that she "reminds us of Hitler and his anti-Semitic policy that took to death 6 million Jews in Europe."

"Whatever the merits of Isabella in her own historical context, her policy of expulsion of Jews and Muslims, her links with the Inquisition, would seem to make it im-

possible to view her as a model for Christians after the Second Vatican Council," the rabbi wrote.

An official of the congregation for sainthood causes confirmed the temporary halt in the case, but said it was nothing unusual and did not mean that her case had been brought to an end.

"This is not a monumental thing," said the official. He would not say what aspects of her life needed further historical research.

Spanish Father Anastasio Gutierrez, promoter of Queen Isabella's cause, told CNS April 3 that he disagreed with the decision as he had already presented the congregation with more than 3,500 documents bound in 27 volumes and had responded in writing to further questions from the congregation.

"In my opinion all Jews are against her because they are anti-Catholic," said Father Gutierrez when asked about Jewish criticisms of Queen Isabella.

"She is the symbol of the implanting of Catholicism around the world," he added. "Almost two-thirds of the Catholics in the world today are due to her."

Father Gutierrez cited the Spanish colonial implanting of Catholicism in Latin America and the Philippines and the queen's expulsion of the Muslim Moors as political rulers in Europe, allowing it to retain its Christian heritage.

Father Gutierrez said Queen Isabella is a long way from being declared a saint because her case lacks evidence of the necessary miracles.

The current process before the congregation involves judging whether the queen should be declared venerable, he said. In this stage, proof is needed that she led a life of heroic virtues. No miracles are needed.

For the next step — beatification — proponents would need proof of a miracle caused by her divine intercession. The final step is sainthood, which also requires a miracle.

"No miracle exists yet," said Father Gutierrez.

In March, a group of Catholic and Jewish scholars in Chicago urged the Vatican to suspend Queen Isabella's cause for canonization.

"It is our conviction that Isabella's canonization would cause significant harm both to Catholic-Jewish and Catholic-Muslim relations throughout the world because of her identification with the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain," said the letter written by the Catholic-Jewish Scholars Dialogue. The letter was addressed to Cardinal Angelo Felici, prefect of the sainthood congregation.

Contributing to this story was Nancy Frazier O'Brien in Washington.

# Father Ritter may have to testify about allegations against him

By Tracy Early  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Franciscan Father Bruce Ritter, founder and until last year president of the Covenant House ministry to homeless youths, may have to testify under oath about sexual allegations against him in connection with a suit filed against him, his province and Covenant House.

But an attorney for Father Ritter's order expressed confidence that the lawsuit, filed in December, would be dismissed.

The suit is being brought by Darryl J. Bassile, a former Covenant House resident who accused Father Ritter of sexual misconduct. He is represented by Jeffrey Anderson, a St. Paul, Minn., attorney who said in a March 29 telephone interview, that he will take Father Ritter's deposition if the suit is allowed to go forward.

Papers asking for dismissal of the case have been filed in district state court by Ronald Lafferty, a New York attorney representing Father Ritter's Immaculate Conception Province of Conventual Franciscans in Union City, N.J. He told Catholic News Service March 28 that he filed the papers Feb. 15 on grounds that the statute of limitations had expired.

Anderson said that in his response, due by April 18, he would ask for an exception to the statute of limitations on the basis of "delayed discovery" of the damages.

He said that only through therapy and the public disclosures has Bassile come to realize the source of his problems.

Robert W. McGrath, communications officer for Covenant House, said the agency would not comment on the suit.

Father Ritter's attorney, Stanley S. Arkin of New York, did not return a phone

call. Lafferty, who said he was working with Arkin and Covenant House attorney Paul C. Saunders, told CNS he felt confident the suit would be dismissed.

Bassile, who according to his attorney now works with the disabled in New Jersey, is one of several young men who accused Father Ritter of sexual misconduct.

No case against Father Ritter was ever prosecuted. Manhattan District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau, who had investigated the sex charges as well as charges of financial impropriety, ended his investigation by saying he had found insufficient evidence to prosecute the case.

Bassile said last year that Father Ritter initiated a sexual relationship with him shortly after he went to Covenant House in 1973, at the age of 14, and continued it until Bassile left in 1975.

Bassile reportedly took his story to Father Ritter's province after Kevin Lee Kite, 25, made the first public allegations against the priest in December 1989. When the province failed to act, Bassile said, he went to *The New York Times*.

The day Bassile's story ran in the *Times* — Feb. 6, 1990 — Father McHugh announced that he was directing Father Ritter to take a leave of absence from Covenant House, and that the province was conducting its own investigation.

Father McHugh announced one year ago that the investigation had concluded, and that Father Ritter, who meanwhile had resigned from Covenant House, was being directed to stop living in private quarters and return to community life. But the provincial did not reveal any findings of the investigation.



AP/Wide World Photos  
**DISCORDANT SYMBOLS** — An Israeli soldier wearing a prayer shawl attends special Passover prayers at the Western Wall in Jerusalem March 31, holding his prayer book in one hand and a rifle in the other.