

Exiled leader says all U.S. needs to do is call

By Susan McLain Sullivan
Catholic News Service

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Haiti's exiled president, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, has stated that democracy could be restored to Haiti with just one phone call — from the White House.

"No justice, no peace. No peace, no democracy. No democracy, plenty of refugees," said Father Aristide, who has been living in Venezuela since his overthrow last September.

"If the American government wants the Haitian military out, a phone call will do the job," he said.

Speaking May 28 to some 7,500 Haitian residents of Florida, the ousted leader promised the crowd that "liberation is coming."

His words — delivered in Creole, English and Spanish — periodically brought listeners to their feet and spurred long applause at different points throughout the speech.

Father Aristide said the desperate exodus of Haitian boat people would end when democracy was restored. His address was sponsored by the Haitian Catholic Center of West Palm Beach.

He sidestepped any condemnation of President Bush's executive order in late May to return all intercepted Haitian boat people to their homeland without first hearing their asylum claims.

At a luncheon appearance the next day, Father Aristide spoke again of his conviction that Bush administration pressure could bring a swift resolution to Haiti's conflict.

He said that previous Haitian dicta-

tors had fled the country after "a phone call."

The ousted president stressed his continued hope for an eventual return to democracy in Haiti.

Father Aristide said he had received a collective commitment of \$511 million in economic aid from various nations that would be available to Haiti if democracy were restored.

Economic development of the country would provide needed jobs and help democracy thrive, he said, imploring U.S. residents to "help my country move from misery to profit."

If conditions are allowed to continue to deteriorate, he said, Los Angeles-style riots were likely to occur.

"Up until now, these poor people continue to say 'yes' to embargoes," said Father Aristide. The reason, he said, is not "for the joy to suffer" but because they feel the suffering may bring an end to the current crisis.

On May 28 President Bush closed U.S. ports to ships that violate the trade embargo against Haiti, saying the action was aimed at opponents of democracy, not Haiti's poor. Haitians have said many European nations failed to take seriously the international embargo imposed last fall after the military overthrow of Father Aristide.

One of Father Aristide's many fans, Jean Badio, a Miami resident, drove hours to hear the ousted president talk in West Palm Beach.

"He went straight to the point," said Badio. "Today we realize (Father) Aristide is the only hope. Without (Father) Aristide there is no country," he said.



AP/Wide World Photos
U.S. Coast Guardsmen from the cutter Escanabe lift a child aboard after guardsmen picked up the child and other Haitian refugees in international waters off the coast of Haiti in the during the week of May 10.



AP/Wide World Photos
SUFFERING FROM SHORTAGES — Five-month-old Lulzim Dlada and Bukurie Dlada, 38, sit at the Kavaja Children's Hospital in Kavaja, Albania. In March, doctors at the hospital — which lacks supplies and equipment — struggled to save Lulzim from malnutrition.

Groups seek hearings on women's issues

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Calling the third draft of the U.S. bishops' pastoral on women "no more acceptable than the first two," 24 Catholic feminist and church-reform groups have urged the bishops to hold new hearings on women's concerns.

The 24 groups, members of two umbrella organizations — Women-Church Convergence and the National Council of Church Reform Organizations — urged the bishops to hold a series of public hearings during their June 18-20 meeting at the University of Notre Dame.

The bishops are expected to discuss the proposed pastoral letter in open session at Notre Dame and to vote on a final draft at their general meeting in November.

In a joint statement released in May, the groups said reconsidering the document at such hearings could "avert disaster" and prevent the "alienation of a major segment of Catholic women and a good number of Catholic men."

Publishing the document as is "can only represent a major embarrassment for the U.S. church," the statement said.

The groups urged the bishops to schedule hearings that would include a broad spectrum of Catholic women's groups and to use a forum that would allow "free comment, questions and answers, and genuine dialogue."

The letter was sent to all members of the bishops' committee charged with writing the pastoral letter and to members of the bishops' Committee for Women in Society and in the Church.

Signers included Catholics for a Free Choice, National Assembly of Religious Women, the National Coalition of American Nuns, Quixote Center, the Women's Ordination Conference and New Ways Ministry.

Meanwhile, Bishop Joseph L. Imesch of Joliet, Ill., chairman of the committee charged with writing the pastoral letter, said the bishops set out to write a "middle-of-the-road" document, a

task he thought was "workable."

Speaking in Joliet at a Mass honoring parish "women of the year," Bishop Imesch remarked, however, that it is the document's middle-of-the-road stance on issues that places its future in question.

Bishop Imesch, a Detroit native, compared writing the document to buying a new family car.

Family members "become disappointed when they see a Ford Taurus brought home" when they were expecting a more luxurious Lexus, he said.

The difficulty, he said, is that "we never set out to do a Lexus. We probably couldn't produce a Lexus."

Bishop Imesch said he believes the process involved in writing the pastoral letter has brought about a deeper awareness for women's concerns.

"Never before have the concerns of women been so discussed (in the church) as they have in the past eight years," he said.

Speakers on both sides of abortion warn of lost voters over issue

By Pauline Tomi Austin
Catholic News Service

SALT LAKE CITY — The warning that abortion could cost the Republican Party votes was the one area of common ground for opposing panelists at a platform committee hearing.

But while supporters of abortion rights predicted an exodus from the party if the GOP continues to oppose their positions, abortion foes said changing the plank would alienate many Republican voters.

Abortion demonstrators from both sides outnumbered party guests, pane-

lists, committee members and media at the Republican Platform Hearing in Salt Lake City May 26.

Although several other issues were on the agenda, the hour-long segment on whether the GOP should continue to formally oppose abortion drew the most attention.

"Republicans who have abandoned their commitment to unborn children go down in defeat," warned Carol Lang, director of public policy for the National Right to Life Committee. She said the pro-abortion platform of the Democratic Party has "caused millions of Democrats and independents to

vote Republican in the last three presidential elections."

Panelists who want the party to change the abortion plank said the GOP will lose affiliates over the issue.

The belief that opposing abortion helps candidates "is a lie, pure and simple," said Anne E. W. Stone, head of Republicans for Choice.

"My opponents say to women who can't afford to have children or afford to care for them that adoption, not abortion is the answer," Stone said. "But adoption alone is not the answer. Today in this country there are thousands of babies no one wants to

adopt. Babies who are not perfect, babies with AIDS, babies born addicted to crack and non-white babies.

Stone said abortion should be discouraged through methods other than legislation.

Helen Alvare, spokeswoman for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, said the central question in abortion debates is "what is the moral value of each human life?"

"Abortion contradicts the principle that human beings possess inherent and inalienable rights that government exists to protect, not destroy," she said.