

Church leaders call for aid, inquiry

Cardinal calls Bosnians' plight 'gravest scandal'

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Vatican officials and churchmen from the United States and England have called for more humanitarian aid to war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina and an investigation into alleged death camps run by Serbians.

The Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, called the Bosnian situation "the gravest scandal facing humanity." Archbishop John R. Roach, chairman of the International Policy Committee of the U.S. Catholic Conference, said, "The litany of horrors grows longer and more repulsive with each passing day."

Croatian Cardinal Franjo Kuharic told Vatican Radio Aug. 7 that concentration camps do exist in Bosnia.

"We have truly terrible accounts of how people are being treated, about massacres that have taken place, about torture practiced on people, about rapes of women and girls," he said.

"It is necessary that international organizations insist on visiting these camps, to see the on-site situation, to listen to the imprisoned people," Cardinal Kuharic said. He added that "sanctions are not an effective means" for stopping Serbian aggression.

Cardinal Sodano said the Vatican wants the U.N. Commission on Human Rights to investigate the existence of the concentration camps. He said Cardinal Kuharic had given the Vatican "more than reliable information" that the camps exist.

"If the information about these concentration camps is true, it is a troubling thing," Cardinal Sodano said. "One never would have thought that in Europe it would come back to this."

During World War II, the Nazis detained millions of people in concentration camps. Pursuing a policy of genocide against people of particular religious, ethnic, national and racial backgrounds — as well as homosexuals — they murdered an estimated 15 million to 16 million people. Six million of those killed were Jewish — a toll that took nearly two-thirds of Europe's pre-World War II Jewish population.



AP/Wide World Photos

Videotape by Britain's Independent Television News network, this photo shows Muslim prisoners in a Serbian camp in northern Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Cardinal Sodano said the Vatican would join the growing number of nations requesting a U.N. investigation into human-rights abuses in Bosnia-Herzegovina because "they attack human dignity."

He also said Pope John Paul II supports "all the initiatives of the United Nations and European states to put the brakes on this war."

"I would say the European states and the United Nations have the duty and the right to intervene to disarm those who want to kill," he said. "This is not to encourage war, but to prevent it."

Cardinal Kuharic told the Italian newspaper *L'Unita* Aug. 8 that the church has firsthand information about the location of the camps and conditions there.

"We have collected testimony about how men, women and children were brought to these camps by force, how there have been massacres, how people are tortured and how some young women have been raped," the Croatian cardinal said.

"We are facing a situation that one would have thought was a memory of the past, but instead it's a dramatic reality today," he said.

The Vatican's equivalent of a foreign minister, Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, told the Italian Catholic newspaper *Avvenire* that the Vatican has received information about human-rights abuses from sources other than

the media and Cardinal Kuharic, "but for now we prefer not to publish them in order to protect the safety of the sources."

He also said that "the Holy See has never spoken of a military intervention" to bring peace to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"War, as the pope has said, always remains an adventure without return," he said.

The best means for stopping the fighting and "the gross and brutal violations of elementary human rights" is through dialogue and negotiation, said the archbishop, head of the Vatican Secretariat of State's Section for Relations with States.

He cited three "intolerable" occurrences in the war: the difficulty and often impossibility of bringing in humanitarian aid; the forced deportation of civilians; and "the existence of detention camps with inhumane conditions."

"The Holy See cannot but urge and encourage international organizations to stop these horrors," he said.

In a statement issued in Washington Aug. 6, Archbishop Roach said reports of the war "testify to an ongoing barbarism that evokes some of the worst memories of World War II."

"The savagery and injustice of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina evokes moral revulsion in all of us," Archbishop Roach said.

"What is especially revolting is that

many of these horrors are neither accidents nor aberrations, but are deliberately carried out in the name of 'ethnic cleansing,' a violent effort to create ethnically pure areas whose driving force is a virulent and expansionist nationalism that considers tolerance, respect and harmony among diverse peoples to be its greatest enemy."

Although he said "no party is blameless for human-rights violations," that should not "obscure the central reality of Serbian aggression or the need for the international community to find effective ways to protect the innocent."

In a letter to British Prime Minister John Major, Cardinal George Basil Hume of Westminster said people were looking for an "early response" from politicians to the "horrifying and totally unacceptable" situation in Bosnia.

"It is not for me, as a churchman, to define what would be politically and militarily acceptable, but people are looking for an early response which needs to be effective and sustainable in bringing humanitarian relief to those who are suffering, particularly the Muslim community, and also a cessation of hostilities," Cardinal Hume said.

In New York, Rabbi James Rudin, interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee, said that for Jews the news of the alleged death camps was "a shock of recognition."

The tales of families being separated, people with the "wrong names" being incarcerated, and the term "ethnic cleansing," the sight of people being transported in railroad cars, the sight of gaunt prisoners "touches Jews at their deepest level," he said.

"I've seen the eyes before; I've seen the ribs before," he told Catholic News Service. "We knew immediately" what was going on.

The situation has "energized the Jewish community in a way I haven't seen" in a long time.

He noted that the community has reacted strongly and swiftly even though "this is not primarily a Jewish problem."

U.S. Jewish leaders have been meeting with government officials "to press the case that this is unacceptable in 1992."

He said the world typically reacts with denial to such atrocities.

"We do believe the United States has a key role to play" in ending the death-camp activity and reaching a negotiated end to the Balkan war.

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