

# Church leaders back U.N. effort in Somalia

By Laurie Hansen  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — As the first U.S. Marines were ordered to duty in Somalia, most church leaders expressed support for the United Nations plan for humanitarian intervention in the east-African nation.

Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul and Minneapolis, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Policy, issued a Dec. 4 statement saying the bishops support the U.N. decision to provide military support for humanitarian relief in Somalia and the U.S. decision to supply thousands of troops for the effort.

Lawrence Pezzullo, executive director of Catholic Relief Services, said current chaos in Somalia makes sending in troops necessary to establish "some modicum of order" so that food can be distributed. CRS is the U.S. bishops' overseas relief and development agency.

Meanwhile, as television networks carried into living rooms around the world scenes of starving Somali adults and their skeletal children, Pope John Paul II said the international community should make certain humanitarian aid reaches suffering populations.

Since Somali dictator Mohammed Siad Barre was ousted in January, 1991, more than 300,000 Somalis have died from the combined effects of famine and warfare. U.N. officials report that 2 million more are on the brink of starvation.

While not specifically endorsing military operations, the pope said relief must get through — even if it means intervening in the internal affairs of a country.

"War between nations or internal conflicts must not condemn defenseless civilians to death by hunger," the pope said Dec. 5 at the opening of a weeklong U.N. conference in Rome on nutrition.

"The conscience of humanity," he said, requires that intervention be undertaken in cases in which "the sur-

vival of populations and entire ethnic groups is seriously compromised."

Pax Christi USA, based in Erie, Pa., however, voiced concern over U.S. deployment of troops.

In a Dec. 7 statement, the national Catholic peace organization said it recognized the need to respond to the desperate situation in Somalia, but argued that the United Nations made a mistake in allowing the United States to command the U.N. operation.

Pax Christi said it was "vitaly important to the impartiality of the United Nations that no individual country be given unilateral control" of the effort.

The Pax Christi statement also called for more clearly defined rules of engagement that would allow troops to use force only in self-defense. It rejected any use of military force to disarm rebel groups in Somalia.

"Let me be very clear: Our mission is humanitarian, but we will not tolerate armed gangs ripping off their own people, condemning them to death by starvation," President Bush said in a televised Oval Office address.

On Dec. 4 Bush ordered about 28,000 U.S. troops to Somalia to block warring Somali gangs from intercepting food shipments.

The first U.S. troops — part of the U.N.-authorized deployment — were expected to reach Somalia less than a week after Catholic and other churches nationwide participated in a Dec. 4-6 interfaith "Sabbath for Prayer and Petition" to pray for peace in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia.

Echoing the concerns of Pax Christi, Sister Maura Browne, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur who is executive director of Washington-based Africa Faith and Justice, told CNS that having the troops under U.S. command would send "the completely wrong signal" to Somalia.

She said care must be taken to avoid turning the strife into a "West vs. Islam conflict."



AP/Wide World Photos

HELP FOR HUNGRY — A mother holds her sick child in a Red Cross hospital in Baidoa, Somalia, Dec. 4.

Roger P. Winter, director of the U.S. Committee on Refugees, said most peacekeeping troops ideally would be sent "from countries which share Somalia's African or Islamic heritage."

"But the failure of other countries to act has forced the United States to take the lead by deploying American troops," said Winter.

He urged U.N. members to contribute troops to make the peacekeeping force a multinational effort.

Archbishop Roach echoed the sentiment of many church leaders and relief organization staffers, saying the effort's long-term goal should be to re-establish Somali political authority to guarantee

relief efforts and restore public order.

He said the U.S. hierarchy is generally reluctant to support military intervention. But he said that the disaster in Somalia "justifies these limited steps to halt the loss of innocent human life."

Sister Browne, too, said "major diplomatic efforts" — including talks with local Somali clan and sub-clan leaders — must go hand in hand with military intervention.

Pezzullo called sending in troops only a "stopgap measure." Ultimately, he said, the country must find a political solution that allows Somalis to "determine their own destiny."

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