

# Pope encounters AIDS victim, crisis during trip

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

KAMPALA, Uganda — In Uganda, a 13-year-old rape victim told Pope John Paul II she contracted AIDS from her attacker. And a Sudanese bishop warned the pontiff that his country's Muslim-led government would try using the papal visit for political gain.

Pope John Paul's Feb. 3-10 visit to Africa was to end with a nine-hour stop in Khartoum, Sudan.

Earlier in the 10th papal visit to Africa, the pope met with Muslim and African animist leaders in the West African nation of Benin and stressed interreligious peace.

In Uganda Pope John Paul celebrated Mass in Gulu and Kampala Feb. 6-7, held separate meetings with the nation's Catholic and Anglican bishops, and prayed at a shrine to the Ugandan martyrs.

The pope flew to Uganda Feb. 5 after two days in Benin, where he urged Christians, Muslims and followers of traditional African religions to show respect for each others' religious beliefs. In Cotonou, Benin, the pope met the chief of Benin's vodun cult, the ancient animist religion that was translated, after mixing with some Catholic practice, into Caribbean voodoo.

The roar of the crowd and enthusiastic singing of 30,000 boisterous youths in Uganda turned into quiet reflection Feb. 6 when a 13-year-old girl told the pope she had been raped and now has the AIDS virus.

Veronica Chansa said, "Holy Father, your little daughter Veronica stands here as a challenge" to other youngsters to follow "good behavior."

"Chastity is the only safe and virtuous way to put an end to the tragic plague of AIDS," the pope told the young people.

An estimated 1.5 million Ugandans have the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS. The country has reported 35,000 full-blown cases of the disease, the largest number on the African continent.

The pope told the young people that sexuality is a language through which two people can communicate their love for each other.

"Honest sexual 'language' requires a commitment to lifelong fidelity," he said. Without that commitment, "sexual relations are a lie."

In a Feb. 7 visit to St. Francis Hospital in Nsambya, located on the outskirts of Kampala, the pope blessed dozens of sick people, many of whom have AIDS and most of whom have tested HIV positive.

He left a written message addressed to all Uganda's sick.

The pope said the challenge of AIDS must be faced by everyone "with much love and care for the victims, with much generosity to the orphans and with much commitment to a renewed way of Christian moral living."

The pope spent the morning of Feb. 6 in the northern Ugandan town of Gulu, about 40 miles south of the border with Sudan, where he was to travel Feb. 10.

Bishop Paride Taban of Torit came from Sudan to Gulu to warn the pope that the Sudanese government would try to pretend in front of him that it is not conducting a war against Sudanese Christians.

They will try "to blindfold him with the red carpet," Bishop Taban told reporters before giving the pope a letter from the New Sudanese Council of

Churches.

The ecumenical group of church leaders, based in areas controlled by the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, asked the pope to make himself the voice of the black Christians and animists who live in southern Sudan.

Members of the Arab-Muslim dominated government of Khartoum will shake hands with the pope, they said.

"You must know, Holy Father, that you are shaking hands dripping blood of Sudanese Christians," the letter said.

Several hundred Sudanese and Sudanese refugees attended the Mass at an open sports field in Gulu.

The area around Gulu was the scene of heavy rebel fighting from 1986-91 after Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni came to power in a military coup.

Museveni, an Anglican, attended the Mass. Armed Ugandan troops patrolled the airport and Mass site.

The divisions between Ugandan Anglicans and Catholics, reflected even in the country's political parties, was the focus of the pope's Feb. 7 meeting with Anglican bishops at the Anglican shrine to the Ugandan martyrs at Nakiyanja.

The pope began the meeting with 10 minutes of prayer before a statue of the 13 Catholics and nine Anglicans who were burned alive there in 1886.

Dying together, the Anglican and Catholic martyrs show Ugandans the power of the faith they share, the pope said.

"By our divisions the credibility of the Gospel is weakened," he told the bishops.

After the meeting the pope went to the Catholic shrine to the martyrs at Namugongo, less than a mile away.

From the altar on a platform extending into an artificial lake, the pope said, "Christ's light shone bright in the great fire which consumed St. Charles Lwanga and his companions. May the light of that holocaust never cease to shine in Africa."

With President Museveni in attendance again, the pope said Ugandans need the light of the Gospel to dispel the darkness lingering after years of civil unrest, violence and fear.

"Today Uganda stands at the crossroads: her people need the salt of God's word to bring out the virtues of honesty, goodness, justice and concern for the dignity of others, which alone can guarantee the rebuilding of their country on a firm foundation," he said.

That evening the pope asked Ugandan Catholic bishops to help their people learn the importance of solidarity.



AP/Wide World Photos

A Vatican prelate kisses the hand of Pope John Paul II at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci Airport Feb. 3, as the pope prepared to depart for his eight-day pilgrimage to the African countries of Benin, Uganda and the Sudan.

## Relief agencies call upon U.S. to deal with Balkans

By Laurie Hansen  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Saying the war in the former Yugoslavia mocks international human rights' standards, representatives of private U.S. relief and resettlement agencies have urged U.S. leadership to help halt the fighting.

"To the people of the former Yugoslavia who look to America, we are invisible," said a statement by InterAction, an association of U.S. relief and resettlement organizations.

"We have recognized the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Yet we see no American flag flying over an embassy in (the Bosnian capital of) Sarajevo. Thirty nations have committed peacekeeping forces to assist the United Nations' relief effort. There are no Americans among this force," said the statement.

It went on to say that "the United States must become engaged, in concert with other concerned nations, to bring about an immediate end to the violation of every human right we as Americans hold sacred."

The statement was written by an InterAction delegation that traveled throughout Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina Jan. 23-31. Jesuit Father Richard Ryscavage, executive director of the U.S. bishops' office of Migration and Refugee Services, was a member of the delegation.

The InterAction statement was read at the start of a Feb. 5 briefing on Capitol Hill at which delegation members spoke about the war in the Balkans.

Sarajevo has been under siege for 10 months by rebel Serbs, perched in mountain strongholds surrounding the city. Warring among Bosnian Serbs, Muslims and Croats has claimed an estimated 16,000 lives.

At the briefing, Deborah Mark, director of planning and government relations for the Hebrew Immigrant Society and a delegation member, called the former Yugoslavia "a refugee camp in

the heart of Europe."

She said that the war's refugees had experienced much violence, were "extremely traumatized" and felt "an enormous sense of betrayal" because so often they had been victimized at the hands of neighbors.

Mark said she heard refugees say that — prior to the war — Serbs, Croats and Muslims had "gone to each other's weddings" and in the workplace were colleagues.

On the one hand, she said, the refugees say they "want to revert to the reality before the war," while on the other hand they say now it "would be impossible to live side-by-side as they once did."

Many of the refugees, she said, "say they can't understand how the world allowed this to happen to them."

Julia Taft, a board member of the International Rescue Committee and delegation member, said that there is no mass famine in the Balkans, but there are some areas that haven't been reached by relief convoys.

Wells Klein, executive director of the American Council of Nationalities Service, said the United Nations peacekeeping force had been "a massive failure" in the former Yugoslavia because of insufficient troops and inappropriate rules of engagement.

He said the disdain in which the United Nations is held "puts in question the ability of the whole international community" to deal with problems in post-Cold War world.

Father Ryscavage said there were some 20,000-70,000 persons detained in concentration camps, prisons and detention centers in the region. He said some 6,800 had been released for resettlement or to fill asylum slots in various nations.

The United States has said it will accept 350 detainees and their families, an estimated 1,000 persons, he said.

"We feel the U.S. pledge is embarrassingly low and stingy," said Father Ryscavage.



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