

Sudanese Christians not abandoned, pope says

Pontiff concludes visit with Mass

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

KHARTOUM, Sudan — God has not abandoned Sudan's suffering Christians who are sharing in the passion of Christ, Pope John Paul II said.

Their names are written "on the palms of the hands of Christ, pierced by the nails of the crucifixion," the pope said during a Feb. 10 Mass in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan.

The pope said he was spending nine hours in Khartoum to encourage Sudanese Christians "to stand firm and to take heart."

Khartoum's fundamentalist Arab-Islamic regime is currently fighting a war with black Christians and animists from the South.

Sudanese Christian leaders, the Vatican and international human rights organizations have accused the Khartoum government of violating religious liberty and other human rights.

"The whole church understands your distress and prays for you," the pope told Christians gathered for Mass at Green Square, on the city's outskirts.

The prayers and readings at the Mass were recited in Arabic, but the pope read his homily in English. An estimated 200,000 people gathered on the thick dust of Green Square for the Mass while camels scrounged for food along the fence.

The Mass was a delayed Sudanese celebration of the May 1992 beatification of Sister Josephine Bakhita, a former slave who was born in what is now Sudan.

Leaders of the Sisters of Charity of



Pope John Paul II waves to Ugandan dancers Feb. 9 before he celebrates a Mass in the northern town of Soroti. The pontiff recently concluded his eight-day visit to Africa.

AP/Wide World Photos

Canossa, the order Blessed Bakhita joined in Italy after the family she was given to moved there, brought relics of her body back for each Sudanese diocese.

Blessed Bakhita is an example for all Christians of "the value of reconciliation and love, for in her heart she overcame any feelings of hatred for those who had harmed her."

The pope said he wanted "to appeal for a new relationship between Christians and Muslims in this land."

While Christians must be willing to forgive their oppressors and work with Muslim citizens for the good of the country, he said they must not bow down when their rights are violated.

"There can be no genuine peace un-

less believers stand together in rejecting the politics of hate and discrimination, and in affirming the right to religious and cultural freedom in all human societies," he said, quoting from a speech he made in January to Muslim leaders.

"Only the perversion of religious sentiment leads to discrimination and conflict," he said.

The pope had special words of comfort for the thousands of Southerners forced to live in squalor on the outskirts of Khartoum because of the fighting in the South.

"The immense suffering of millions of innocent victims impels me to voice my solidarity with the weak and defenseless, who cry out to God for help,

for justice, for respect for their God-given dignity as human beings, for their basic human rights, for the freedom to believe and practice their faith without fear or discrimination," he said.

The pope said the church and people of good will rejoiced when a leader of Sudan's ruling Revolutionary Command Council announced in May 1991 a new Sudanese political system that would include guarantees of religious freedom.

"It was said that all legitimate diversities would be respected in a multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious country; that all religions would be free in their religious activities," the pope said.

In October, the Vatican issued a statement saying that 18 months after the government declaration, the situation in Sudan "is quite different" from what was promised.

"Religious freedom is a right which every individual has because it springs from the inalienable dignity of each human being," the pope said.

When governments discriminate on the basis of religion, "a fundamental injustice is committed against man and against God, and the road to peace is blocked," he said.

"Today the successor of Peter and the whole church reaffirm their support of your bishops' insistent call for respect of your rights as citizens and as believers," the pope said.

The life of Blessed Bakhita shines as a ray of hope for Sudanese Christians and as proof that the human spirit can resist attempts to enslave it, he said.

"Bakhita has come back to you," he said. She is a "daughter of Sudan sold into slavery as a living piece of merchandise and yet still free. Free with the freedom of the saints."

Bishop: Haiti must solve crisis

JACMEL, Haiti (CNS) — A Haitian bishop said he believes his country's 16-month-old crisis cannot be solved by an internationally brokered agreement.

"The only solution to the present situation has to be a Haitian one," said Bishop Guire Poulard of Jacmel.

He said this would involve finding a consensus among all parties, including the army and the legislative and judicial branches of government as well as the executive. But Bishop Poulard agreed that it would be difficult to find a Haitian who would be capable of mediating such an agreement.

Bishop Poulard spoke of the crisis that has arisen in Haiti since its democratically elected president, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was deposed in a military coup in September 1991.

He said he believes international mediators from the Organization of American States and the United Nations are not impartial and that their efforts to broker an agreement between Father Aristide and the de facto authorities amount to interference.

The bishop also said the special U.N. envoy, Dante Caputo, "has imposed himself as someone presenting an ultimatum."

"I don't think that's the best way of resolving a conflict," he said.

Caputo, a former Argentine minister and president of the 1988 U.N. General Assembly, has arranged for



AP/Wide World Photos
Navy medic Elliott Keck helps Haitian refugee Jean Louis Door onto a stretcher at a camp at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base Feb. 10. Door is one of the refugees on hunger strike to protest U.S. policy barring refugees infected with the HIV virus from entering the nation.

an international team of human rights monitors to go to Haiti for a year to help curb political repression and widespread human rights violations while negotiations get under way for the return of democracy.

Bishop Poulard said he believes that the presence of 16 human rights monitors in Port-au-Prince and talk of the imminent arrival of more has stemmed army human rights abuses in the countryside.

Response to defeat FOCA unprecedented, officials say

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Although exact numbers are not known, a nationwide postcard campaign urging Congress to defeat the Freedom of Choice Act was likely to become one of the largest grass-roots U.S. Catholic efforts ever on behalf of the unborn.

The National Committee for a Human Life Amendment and the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities jointly sponsored the postcard project, dubbed National Project Life Sunday.

The project centered on the Jan. 23-24 weekend but some parishes ran out of postcards and extended the campaign to other weekends, according to Mike Taylor, executive director of the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment, a Catholic pro-life organization.

Five million sets of postcards were distributed to dioceses nationwide to be mailed to the signers' U.S. senator and representative. Also included was a card to be sent to the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment, which is helping to track national participation.

In some dioceses, Catholic lay and non-affiliated pro-life groups joined in the project by printing similar postcards for their members, Taylor said.

The Rochester diocese distributed 27,500 cards and copies of those cards, according to Jack Balinsky, director of diocesan Social Ministry. Since the cards were then mailed back either by

individuals or by parishes, diocesan officials had no way of knowing how many of the cards were actually sent to Washington.

Gail Quinn, director of the U.S. bishops' pro-life office, linked the response to the project to President Clinton's recent executive orders reversing government limits on abortion.

"The effect of these orders, and the fact that President Clinton decided to issue them on Jan. 22, the 20th anniversary of the *Roe vs. Wade* decision, has served at once to anger and energize pro-life parishioners," she said.

"National Project Life Sunday shows that the 20th anniversary of *Roe vs. Wade* did not mark the demise of the pro-life movement — as many in the media have been saying — but rather its rebirth," she added.

Quinn and Taylor said it will be several weeks before any tally of the number of postcards sent to Congress will be available.

The postcards state that passage of the Freedom of Choice Act "would be a disastrous mistake for our country because it mandates abortion on demand as a national policy."

The Freedom of Choice Act, as introduced in Congress in 1992, said that "a state may not restrict the right of a woman to choose to terminate a pregnancy — 1) before fetal viability; or 2) at any time, if such termination is necessary to protect the life or health of the woman."