

# Quake victims get aid of missionaries, pope

CALCUTTA, India (CNS) — Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity have offered permanent shelter and all possible help to children orphaned by India's worst earthquake in more than half a century.

"We have decided to take them in. The poor orphans have suffered so much we will help them," Mother Teresa said.

The quake, which measured 6.4 on the Richter scale, hit the western state of Maharashtra at 3:56 a.m. Sept. 30 and was followed by several tremors.

More than 36 hours after the quake, officials said the death toll was still rising. The official death toll was 11,420 Oct. 1, but state officials and doctors said the final count could be at least double that, with many more bodies still buried under flattened houses.

Doctors with rescue teams estimated at least 22,000 had died and 30,000 were injured.

Sister Priscila, a senior aide, said Mother Teresa had told her nuns in Maharashtra to begin relief work.

"They went with food, medicines, clothing and essential supplies, but were not allowed to enter the affected areas," she said.

Police and Indian soldiers, conduct-

ing the army's biggest peacetime operation, had sealed off the flattened villages to keep out sightseers and others described by one army officer as "well-meaning, but untrained helpers."

The Missionaries of Charity held a special prayer service Oct. 4 for the victims of the quake, which left 150,000 people homeless.

Officials said relief supplies, including clothes and medicine, were needed.

In Baltimore, Catholic Relief Services responded with 350 tons of food and stocks of tarpaulins, blankets and cooking sets.

CRS Executive Director Kenneth F. Hackett said his agency would continue to monitor the area and increase aid as needed.

CRS said that although the bulk of its aid would come from its office in Bombay, India, the agency also has offices in the Indian cities of Calcutta, New Delhi and Madras.

Earlier on Oct. 1, Pope John Paul II offered his prayers for the tens of thousands of dead and injured.

An Oct. 1 telegram said the pope was "deeply saddened by the tragic deaths and great suffering caused by



Rescue workers search through the rubble in the western Indian village of Maharashtra Sept. 30, when a major earthquake brought collapsing mud and mortar onto homes in villages across southern India.

AP/Wide World Photos

the devastating earthquake in west-central India."

The telegram, sent to Archbishop Giorgio Zur, apostolic pro-nuncio to India, was signed by the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano.

The pope asked the archbishop "to convey to the religious and civil authorities the assurance of his prayerful closeness at this difficult time."

"He commends the victims to almighty God and invokes divine

strength and comfort on the injured and on those left homeless," the telegram said.

Sister Priscila, meanwhile, said Mother Teresa had no plans to visit the quake areas: "No, she is not well. She has no major problem, but she needs rest."

Mother Teresa, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, was recovering from heart surgery she underwent in a Calcutta hospital in September.

## Controversy over pastoral reflects tough times in Cuba

### Bishops seek reform, end to U.S. embargo

HAVANA (CNS) — The controversy over a recent pastoral letter by the Catholic bishops of Cuba reflects the difficult political and economic condition of their island nation, which has been the target of a U.S. economic embargo for more than 30 years.

Groups of Cubans lined up to buy copies of the pastoral message, attacked in state-run newspapers but not published by them. Copies could be purchased for a few cents each at the Havana offices of Archbishop Jaime Ortega Alamino.

The 17-page pastoral message, read from church pulpits Sept. 19, called on the communist government to lift its monopoly on political power, and start a national dialogue to save the country from economic and social collapse.

It cited a nationwide moral decline, "closed and omnipresent official ideology," excessive surveillance by state security agencies, ideological discrimination and "many people ... punished for economic or political reasons."

The bishops said they opposed the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba,

which began in 1962, because it makes conditions worse for average Cubans and cited it as one reason for the country's economic deterioration. They also said they opposed the tightening of that embargo through the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992.

The bishops noted that contributing to Cuba's current economic woes was the termination of decades-long aid from the former Soviet Union.

After publication of the letter, the head of the U.S. bishops' International Policy Committee urged the U.S. government to heed the Cuban bishops' call to ease the embargo.

Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis, who chairs the committee, said in a Sept. 28 letter to Secretary of State Warren Christopher that "the letter is a clear and forceful description of the many crises that afflict Cuban society today, an insistent call for needed change and an encouragement to the national dialogue that alone can bring about a better future

for the Cuban people."

The archbishop said he hoped the Clinton administration would "heed the words of the Cuban bishops, support the cause of freedom and respond to the needs of the Cuban people by addressing at least the most onerous and discriminatory provisions of the embargo, beginning with the barriers to the importation of medicines."

The Cuban bishops noted that "lack of even the most basic material things — food, medicine, transportation, electricity and so forth — are fostering a climate of tension that sometimes changes Cubans.... Explosions of irrational violence are beginning to take place in towns and cities. We issue an urgent call to our people not to succumb to the dangerous temptation of violence, which could give rise to even greater evils."

The Cuban news agency *Prensa Latina* quoted a senior Communist Party official, Ricardo Alarcon, as saying the bishops' arguments were similar to

those the United States has used to attack the Cuban government.

The official trade-union journal *Trabajadores* published an attack by Lazaro Barredo, a journalist and member of parliament, who accused the bishops of "stabbing Cuba in the back" and siding with the United States.

But Lisandro Otero, former president of the National Union of Cuban Writers, said "the bishops are right when they ask the government for fast changes."

"The pastoral letter is a very opportune document which deserves a deep reflection," Otero said. "The bishops are correct when they point out that it is not only a political and economic crisis, but also moral."

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