

Bishop decries charges over rebellion in Chiapas

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The head of the U.S. bishops' International Policy Committee has criticized "the careless accusations" made against Mexican church leaders in relation to the indigenous rebellion in the southern state of Chiapas.

Bishop Daniel P. Reilly of Norwich, Conn., said the "deplorable" accusations had been especially directed against Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia of San Cristobal de Las Casas, the diocese in which the rebellion took place.

"It is our hope that these charges have at last been laid to rest," Bishop Reilly said.

"It is our hope as well that the recent actions by the civil authorities may result in new and effective efforts to address the basic issues of social justice that underlie the present crisis," he added.

The U.S. leader's comments came in a Jan. 14 letter to Archbishop Adolfo Suarez Rivera of Monterrey, president of the Mexican bishops' conference, offering support and prayers during the crisis.

Some 100 people have been killed since rebels calling themselves the Zapatista National Liberation Army launched their uprising Jan. 1 by seizing six towns in the impoverished state of Chiapas. Church human rights workers say desperation led indigenous people

— mostly Mayan Indians — to rebel against the government's economic program.

"We share your anguish over the loss of life brought about by the insurrection, especially the killings of innocent noncombatants," Bishop Reilly said.

"We are impressed by the role that the church has played and continues to play in denouncing the violence, in calling for dialogue and a political settlement of the conflict, and in defending human rights, especially the rights of the poorest and most vulnerable," he added.

In a separate letter the same day to Archbishop Hector Gonzalez Martinez of Oaxaca, president of the Mexican bishops' social ministry commission, Bishop Reilly thanked the archbishop for sharing with him the Mexican bishops' recent statements on the rebellion.

"The situation of many campesino (peasant) and indigenous people is totally contrary to God's plan," said a Jan. 12 statement by the Mexican bishops' Permanent Council.

"We address ourselves, then, to the business people, the ranchers and growers and all with influence over the life of the people in Chiapas," the council added. "It is necessary that they undertake actions to alleviate the situation of the poorest, so that they might live with dignity as children of God."



AP/Wide World Photos

A company of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation stands at attention in training, in the Lacandona Mountains between Ocosingo and Guatemala. This highly organized company consists of 156 soldiers including officers.

The bishops established a seven-member Commission for Assisting Reconciliation and Peace in Chiapas; its members include Archbishops Suarez and Gonzalez and Bishop Ruiz.

They also set Jan. 23, the eve of the feast of Our Lady Queen of Peace, as a national day for peace and justice in Chiapas, urging special prayer services and "signs that will encourage us to a harmonious sharing, such as flying white

banners from our houses."

Bishop Reilly told Archbishop Gonzalez that the U.S. bishops are praying that "peace and justice soon come to Chiapas."

"We join you in that prayer and renew our expression of support for all in the church, and especially in the Oaxaca ecclesiastical province, whose ministry to the poor has drawn the attention of the world," he added.

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