

Religious leaders eye elections in S. Africa

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (CNS) — Religious leaders in South Africa urged steps for dealing with ongoing economic, political and social problems when the post-apartheid government takes office following this April's elections.

Protestant and Catholic leaders said there are major problems waiting for the new government's attention as the country moves to majority rule. They included concern over the violence plaguing some of the country's black townships and the proliferation of guns among the white minority.

The new South African government must provide citizens with ways of tackling those tremendous problems, the Catholic bishops of southern Africa said in a Jan. 27 statement.

"The new government will immediately be faced with huge problems, including massive unemployment, ineffective local government, the lack of adequate housing, widespread crime and corruption, a faltering educational system and health services that cannot cope with the demands put on them," the 33-member Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference said.

The government could "eliminate whatever blocks people from reconstructing their lives together and make various resources available."

"But it neither can nor should take exclusive responsibility for refashioning South Africa anew," the bishops said. "Its prime role will be to enable and support people to do that themselves. That is why we strongly encourage families, people gathered at work or in their neighborhoods, the leaders of towns and cities, as well as various communities and organizations to contribute in restructuring the country."

South Africa will hold its first nonra-

cial national elections April 27.

But conservative black and white groups, including the pro-apartheid Afrikaner People's Front, have rejected the constitution agreed upon between the current government and the African National Congress, saying it does not provide for adequate self-determination.

Afrikaner People's Front supporters said Jan. 29 that Afrikaners, descended from 17th-century European settlers, should not yield in their demand for a homeland. They formed a symbolic "alternative" government to support their goals "until a free election of the Afrikaner nation can be held."

Methodist Bishop Peter Storey said churches and businesses will have to help the new government reconstruct the country to prevent disaster.

After the April 27 election, churches in South Africa "will, for the first time, relate to a legitimate government," he said at a Jan. 21 press conference during the World Council of Churches Central Committee meeting in Johannesburg Jan. 20-28. The churches should help the new government deliver its promises on the "legitimate aspirations of people," but without becoming "a lackey of the government."

On violence, Bishop Storey said that one step churches are taking is a bid to curb it is to urge South Africans to hand in their weapons during Lent.

He said churches would "have to negotiate an amnesty" for those handing in unlicensed weapons.

"Nobody knows how many unlicensed guns there are," Bishop Storey said. Most guns found by police in violence-torn townships are unlicensed.

He added that there are "far too many licensed weapons in more privileged communities." With crime on the rise in most South African cities, many

Erasing hate



APWide World Photos

Woman is wiping out graffiti

Irmela Schramm displays her album documenting anti-graffiti and swastikas in Berlin Jan. 26. The 48-year-old teacher took the pictures over eight years before she removed the graffiti from walls.

whites buy guns for self-defense.

The bishop said there is a "very lucrative trade" in guns, particularly AK-47s, from neighboring countries, such as Angola and Mozambique.

Bishop Storey told delegates that in South Africa "the apartheid monster is about to die, but it has spawned some hideously deformed stepchildren, the worst of which is violence."

Four thousand people died in political violence in South Africa in 1993.

More than half of the 13,500 politically motivated killings since 1985 have come since the beginning of negotiations for a democratic South Africa.

The Catholic bishops said some peo-

ple — "whether on the left wanting to hasten some kind of change or on the right seeking to prevent it" — seek to achieve their aims by violence.

"Some even seem to have no real aim except to prevent others from joining together in exercising power," they said. "A large number of people have no respect at all for the value of life, whether the lives of others or their own. Consequently, people are still dying or are forced to flee their homes."

They said anyone preparing for violent actions should realize that the time for armed struggle is past, and there "is now no moral justification for continuing it."

Church urging peace in Bosnia, but struggles with how

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

ROME — As Bosnians huddled in the winter cold, Catholic officials called for foreign pressure to end the civil war, and Western political leaders pondered a forced peace through escalated military intervention.

The hard choices involved were discussed as television cameras focused on snow, freshly stained by the blood of Bosnian children cut down by mortar and sniper fire.

Leading the church's moral indignation was Pope John Paul II. On Jan. 23, a worldwide Catholic day of prayer for peace in the former Yugoslavian republic, he reiterated his call for the world community to "disarm the aggressor" and assure the delivery of humanitarian aid to victims of the fighting.

The pope and Vatican officials have never spelled out the degree of foreign military action needed to carry out these tasks. The indecision by world leaders regarding stepped-up military intervention shows how difficult and controversial these jobs are.

Currently, there are 10,000 U.N. troops in Bosnia and 26,000 in the entire former Yugoslavia. Their tasks are limited to protecting relief supplies and keeping so-called "safe zones" from becoming killing fields.

Western military and political leaders say the troops are far too few to even attempt disarming any of the three warring factions.

Meanwhile, the Catholic bishops in the region complain that U.N. troops cannot even protect relief supplies.

Preventing most of the humanitarian aid from reaching the needy, the bishops said in a Jan. 26 statement.

Britain on Jan. 28 suspended all its aid convoys in the former Yugoslavia after the murder of a British driver and the wounding of two of his colleagues in central Bosnia.

A spokesman for the government's Overseas Development Administration said the decision involved aid provided by official British funds but did not affect the role of British U.N. troops in Bosnia.

The United Nations blames Western indecision for its problems in Bosnia.

This indecision means the United Nations must regard the war as a cancer to be contained rather than rapidly cured, said U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Exemplifying the indecision and con-

troversy was an end-of-January dispute between France, in favor of escalation, and the United States, which is opposed.

France advocated strong military action by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as the best way to get the battling sides to reach a negotiated solution. U.S. President Bill Clinton responded that there is little outside force can do if the Bosnian factions want to continue their civil war.

Russia, the world's second-largest nuclear power, complicated the issue by balking at NATO having the final say in military action. Russia does not belong to NATO and served notice that it wants a determining voice in any military decisions regarding the ex-Yugoslavia.

For Italian Foreign Minister Beniamino Andreatta, a militarily imposed solution is simply impractical because it would require committing 200,000 ground troops willing to suffer heavy

losses and ready to kill numerous Serbs, Croats and Muslims.

All this left Boutros-Ghali lamenting that without a "political will to impose a solution," the United Nations can only propose negotiations, provide humanitarian aid and "contain the military conflict on the ground."

The Bosnian war is "like a cancer that could spread," he said.

"If you have a cancer patient you don't write him off after two years. You continue treatment for as long as it takes, like applying chemotherapy for five, six or seven years," he added.

U.N. members are also unwilling to foot the heavy financial costs of a large peacekeeping force, said Boutros-Ghali.

"The same member states that were prepared to spend \$100 billion every day to sustain the Cold War are not willing to spend \$100 billion or \$200 billion to sustain the U.N. system," he said.

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