

Daunting task in Rwanda for CRS

By Bill Pritchard
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The numbers of destitute refugees in the southern Rwandan town of Gikongoro rivals the numbers massed in the Zairean border town of Goma, where world attention has focused.

Lush crops of fruit and grain are rotting in the fields and orchards while malnourished Rwandans scratch for something to eat in refugee camps.

The whereabouts are known of three of the 20-member staff of Rwandan professionals working for Catholic Relief Services prior to the war. The rest are missing, dead, presumed dead or whereabouts unknown.

Those are some of the facts facing Chris Hennemeyer, the CRS director in Bujumbura, Burundi, who is trying to put the agency's war-shattered program in neighboring Rwanda back together.

Development projects in which CRS was a partner with the Rwandan Caritas program were stopped cold, Hennemeyer said in a telephone interview July 18 from the Rwandan capital, Kigali.

Rwanda Caritas "has been decapitated," he said. "Some of our more dynamic church partners are dead or are in parts unknown."

Hennemeyer was in Kigali to "see what remains of our physical assets." The city is in "a horrible mess" without

power, running water or fuel, but there is nothing "profoundly bad" that cannot be fixed in a few months, he said.

A major focus of all relief agencies now is to try to help guarantee the next harvest, Hennemeyer said.

"Everybody wants to get seeds and tools to the farmers in time for planting" this September, he said.

Hennemeyer said the irony is that in some parts of the country there is an abundance of food available in this harvest season, but no way to get it to the people who need it. That is partly because some areas are dangerous to be in, and partly because of political decisions made by the victorious Rwanda Patriotic Front.

"This would have been an excellent harvest," the veteran of 13 years in Africa said. Bananas and other fruits are rotting on the stem. Sorghum, a major grain, is abundant.

But rebel officials have decided to keep people in refugee camps out of security concerns for now and, as a result, there is no one to gather the crops, he said.

CRS is trucking 200 tons of food per week, bought in Burundi, into southern Rwanda, Hennemeyer said — the biggest food relief operation underway in that part of the country.

"Not too bad for a local operation," the CRS official said, adding that CRS is "moving more food into southern Rwanda than anybody else."

Other agencies add 100 tons to that effort, he said.

Hennemeyer said there is nothing nutritionally sophisticated about the relief effort. The idea is to get as much high protein, high calorie food to as many people as possible.

"We're not even trying to present a balanced package of food," he said. The trucks are loaded with beans and sent on their way to the sprawling camp in the town of Gikongoro.

The shipments supply about 100,000 people, who must search out any supplementary food for themselves, he said.

But there are many more refugees than that in the town and its surroundings.

Hennemeyer said that while the camp in Goma, with an estimated 1 million refugees, has gotten most of the world's notice, Gikongoro is overflowing with nearly 880,000 displaced persons. Many of them are worn out, undernourished and physically disabled by constant flight from the war, he said.

With the chilly, damp weather this time of year below the equator in Rwanda, refugees are suffering from exposure and an increasing incidence of malaria, he said.

Hennemeyer said it suits him that CRS is not working in Goma, because it would simply tax the agency's resources too much.

"If we can't go in there and provide
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Prelate calls haven for Haitians 'humane'

WASHINGTON — The head of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration has praised a new Clinton administration policy on Haitian refugees as "a humane response to a very difficult problem," but stressed it is only a temporary solution. Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick of Newark, N.J., who heads the committee that oversees the work of the Office of Migration and Refugee Services, was referring in his July 14 statement to the new policy of seeking regional safe havens for Haitian boat people.

Pro-life attorney urges hard look at Breyer

WASHINGTON — As Stephen G. Breyer sailed toward confirmation as the nation's 108th Supreme Court justice, a representative of the pro-life legal community urged the Senate Judiciary Committee to take a hard look at the "abortion litmus test" she said is now used for all such nominees. Paige Comstock Cunningham, president of Americans United for Life, testified before the committee July 15, the final day of hearings on Breyer's nomination to succeed retiring Justice Harry A. Blackmun.

Briefing shows large interest in papal trip

NEW YORK — Judging from the turnout for a July 11 media briefing on the planned October visit of Pope John Paul II to the United States, the pope can expect extensive news coverage. About 100 reporters and other media representatives showed up at the first of several briefings held in New York at the Catholic Center, which houses offices of the Archdiocese of New York. Monsignor Francis J. Maniscalco, director of the Media Relations Office of the U.S. Catholic Conference, was the principal briefing spokesman.

Vatican, surgeon deny rumor pope has cancer

VATICAN CITY — A rumor that Pope John Paul II is suffering from bone cancer was denied by the Vatican, by the pope's orthopedic surgeon and by the cardinal who originally repeated the rumor to a Brazilian radio station. Monsignor Piero Pennacchini, vice director of the Vatican press office, said July 12 the rumor is "absolutely false." Dr. Gianfranco Fineschi, the orthopedic surgeon who operated on the pope in late April, said the rumor was "scientifically absurd."

Rome bombings were retaliation by Mafia

ROME — Bombings at two Rome churches last summer were retaliation by the Italian Mafia for increasing Roman Catholic activity against organized crime, government investigators said. Michele Coiro, the chief investigator, said July 14 Pope John Paul II's ringing condemnation of the Mafia in an early May, 1993 visit to Sicily "broke an equilibrium, a tacit agreement of nonbelligerence between the church and the Mafia."

Compiled from Catholic News Service reports.

Pontiff's book expected to sell millions

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II, a published playwright and poet, is focusing on faith and hope in his new book, which is expected by its publishers to sell millions of copies throughout the world.

The book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, a 35-chapter work of more than 200 pages, began as a papal response to written questions posed by an Italian journalist.

Royalties earned by the pope from the book will be given to charitable works, said the chairman of the Italian publishing company handling the project.

The company, Arnaldo Mondadori, will publish the Italian translation from the pope's original Polish and is selling the rights to publish other language editions worldwide, a Mondadori spokeswoman told Catholic News Service July

14.

Vittorio Messori, the journalist who wrote the questions, told the Mondadori-owned magazine, *Panorama*, that his queries were not those of a theologian nor of a journalist specializing in Vatican events.

"I wanted, above all, to know a few things: Does the Vicar of Christ still believe in Christ? Is Christianity true or not?" he said in an interview to be published in the magazine's July 23 issue.

Messori, author of a book-length interview with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger called *The Ratzinger Report*, said, "Cardinal Ratzinger explained to me what is not going well in the church. John Paul II, a great optimist, speaks instead of what works."

Monsignor Piero Pennacchini, assistant director of the Vatican press office said he could not give any information about the book because it was being handled by Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, who was on vacation.

The Mondadori spokeswoman confirmed that the publisher had sold the English rights to the New York-based Random House and the French rights to Editions Plon. The original Polish version will be published by the University of Lublin, where the pope taught.

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