

Talk of invasion unpopular in Haiti

By Bill Pritchard
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Haitian clergy and religious rallied to oppose the country's coup government as Haiti's political and economic circumstances deteriorated.

But they also criticized U.S. policy on Haitian refugees and spoke against a U.S.-led invasion, which has been threatened by Washington.

An outspoken Haitian bishop condemned the return to Haiti of fleeing boat people intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard and at the same time denounced a wave of military-backed repression in his country.

The protest by some of Haiti's Catholic church leaders concerning the nation's dire circumstances came amid growing speculation over the possibility of an invasion aimed at ousting Haiti's military rulers.

The U.N. Security Council voted 12-0 with China and Brazil abstaining to authorize a U.S. assault if economic sanctions fail to remove the government.

Haiti's current administration was set in place by military leaders who in 1991 ousted the popularly elected president, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Haitian religious, however, said an invasion would be designed to help foreign interests, rather than Haitian democracy.

"The intervention would be taken against the Haitian people and is part of the strategy of the international community to legitimate the military coup," the 1,400-member Haitian Conference of Religious said in a joint statement with grass-roots and pro-democracy groups in

late July.

The statement also decried what it called the "false nationalism of the Haitian de facto regime" and "domination and hypocrisy" in U.S. Haitian policy.

"The sending of foreign troops to Haiti — in whatever form or whatever modality — could not be a healthy or liberating alternative for the country," the statement said. "The intervention, in the current conditions of institutional deterioration ... will be the surest way to protect and guarantee the powerful foreign interests against the attempts of a democratic and popular movement that until now ... has upset the American objectives in Haiti."

Bishop Willy Romelus of Jeremie, Haiti, called the U.S. decision to repatriate Haitian boat people an "international crime."

"It's a crime to send back the people to their killers," he told a local news agency July 25.

Thousands of Haitians have been intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard sailing away from their island-nation in small craft. Most have been returned to Haiti. Others have been taken to the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for processing of their claims to political asylum.

Bishop Romelus also accused the international community of passively accepting the expulsion of human rights monitors from the United Nations and the Organization of American States by Haiti's coup-government.

"It seems that the international community recognizes the de facto regime," the 63-year-old prelate said. "There is no other way to understand that the

civilian mission could calmly obey the orders of the military-backed authorities at the same time that poor people have been tortured and killed."

Bishop Romelus accused the current Haitian administration of leading the country to destruction.

"Those who call themselves nationalists are the ones who are killing the country and who do not reflect the constitution," the bishop said.

While the bishop and the religious conference were taking stands on land, three foreign religious who joined the waterborne exodus from the country to express support for Haiti's boat people were picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard at sea in an overcrowded sailboat.

Canadian Franciscan Father Raymond Mailhot, Guatemalan Father Dempsey Loarca and Brazilian Sister Santana Perin and 67 Haitians they embarked with were taken by Coast Guard cutter to the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay July 22 — the day after their departure from Haiti.

A Coast Guard press release said that at 4:10 p.m., July 21, the 110-foot cutter Chandaleur "located a grossly overcrowded 25-foot sailboat with 67 Haitian migrants and three other people who claimed to be Canadian, Brazilian and Guatemalan, 27 miles northeast of Jeremie, Haiti." The group was transferred to a larger cutter for the trip to Guantanamo Bay.

The religious had said in a statement released earlier that day that: "We want to prove our solidarity in a concrete gesture to the Calvary of the Haitian refugees. We want to share the suffering of the people and make a prophetic action to make life better."

EEOC ordered to drop religious harassment

WASHINGTON — The Senate has approved an amendment requiring the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to drop its proposed guidelines about religious harassment. In a July 22 vote, the Senate approved an amendment to the Commerce Department's appropriations bill requiring the EEOC to drop the portion of workplace harassment guidelines that refers to religion.

Former 'AIDS czar' tells Catholics to speak out

CHICAGO — Catholics involved in AIDS ministry won both praise and a challenge from Kristine Gebbie, the nation's first national AIDS policy coordinator, during a conference in Chicago. "You have been there with your quiet caring," Gebbie told the more than 300 participants at the July 21-26 Catholic HIV-AIDS Ministry Conference at Loyola University. "But you haven't made a lot of noise."

Diocese praised for its role in settling strike

WILKES-BARRE, Pa. — An International Ladies' Garment Workers Union official praised the role of the Diocese of Scranton in helping settle a 40-day strike against Leslie Fay Inc., the second-largest women's clothing manufacturer in the United States. Tom Matthews, the ILGWU's assistant regional director, acknowledged the moral leadership of Scranton Bishop James C. Timlin, Father William Pickard, the bishop's personal representative in the dispute, and the Scranton Catholic community. In May, 10,000 Catholics signed petitions supporting the workers' attempts to keep 1,200 jobs at Leslie Fay plants in the United States.

Cardinals reject notion church must apologize

WARSAW, Poland — Three European cardinals who led churches under communist rule have supplied their own interpretations on reports the pope called on the church to apologize for past "faults and omissions." News stories following Pope John Paul II's speech to the College of Cardinals in June said the pope called for such an apology as the 20th century nears a close. In separate interviews, Cardinal Jan Korec of Nitra, Slovakia, and Cardinal Joachim Meisner of Cologne, Germany, questioned the need to apologize for past errors.

New attempt to control religion arises in China

HONG KONG — China has inaugurated what observers say is a new attempt to control religion by requiring all religious groups, including those previously barred from the official rolls, to register with the government. The "carrot" of the new policy, say China observers, is allowing groups previously banned to register without first having to join one of the state-approved patriotic religious associations. The "stick" is the requirement to register, they say, which gives Chinese authorities the tools to restrict and control the burgeoning number of unofficial religious groups in the country.

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