

Pope: Bosnia military action 'last resort'

LES COMBES, Italy (CNS) — As a "last resort" to defend innocent civilians in Bosnia-Herzegovina, international military action could be justified, Pope John Paul II said.

"This remains the last resort. There has always existed the principle of a just war, which is defensive. Even this type of war is ugly, but it (war) is that way," the pope told journalists July 22 as he ended his mountain vacation in Les Combes.

The reporters asked his reaction to a July 21 decision by 16 European and North American countries to authorize NATO forces to bomb Bosnian Serb positions if attacks continue on U.N.-declared safe zones harboring thousands of Bosnian Muslims and Croats.

"If one attacks and wants to trample the right to life and the right to exist, then there is the right to defense," he said.

Pope John Paul said the Vatican was not advising the international community on how to proceed in Bosnia, but outlining the moral principles that should guide specific political and military decisions.

"Above all, we are concerned about

those who are suffering, no matter which side they are on. And everyday we see how much they suffer, including through the images on television," he said.

For the past three years, Pope John Paul has pleaded for an immediate end to the fighting and for the sides involved in the Balkans conflict to treat peace negotiations seriously. He also repeatedly has asked the international community to devote all possible energy to mediating an end to the fighting.

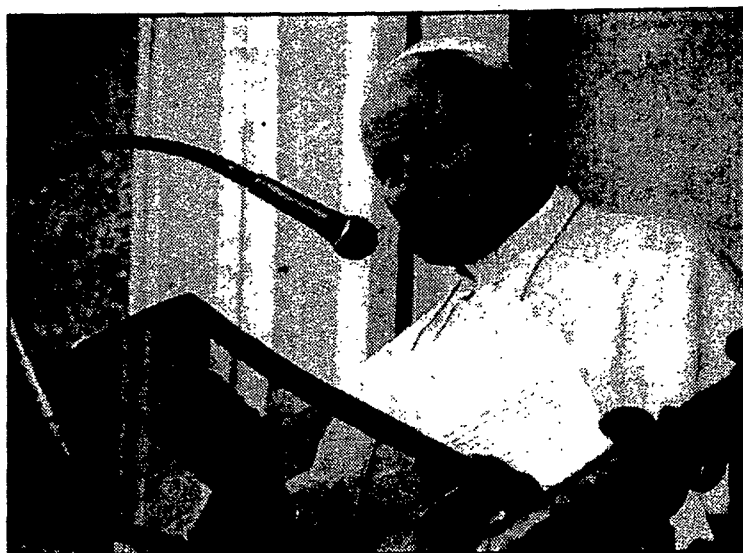
Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls told reporters July 22 the pope believes even a defensive war involves moral problems, which is why it truly must be the last resort for resolving conflict.

"The priority now is humanitarian, to respond to the incredible sufferings of these thousands of people which have reached a level not seen in Europe since the Second World War," Navarro-Valls said.

"The pope's priority is not political,

strategic or military, but humanitarian," he said. He added that the Vatican had been not been asked to mediate, although the papal nuncio in Bosnia met July 22 with Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadzic.

Pope John Paul called on Catholics throughout the world to work for an end to the war through the use of prayer, "the great means we have at our disposal to obtain that which seems humanly difficult."



RNS/Reuters

Pope John Paul II speaks during his noon Angelus address at his summer residence near Rome July 23. The pope, speaking a day after he made his strongest statement on the war in Bosnia, urged those suffering in the former Yugoslavia not to despair of finding peace.

Bishops' pro-life official hails votes on several abortion-policy measures

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The head of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities praised the House of Representatives July 21 for several votes that show it is "willing to restore some common sense to our nation's abortion policy."

Gail Quinn, executive director of the pro-life office, was referring to recent votes by the full House to exclude abortion coverage from federal employees' health insurance and to prohibit abortions at U.S. military hospitals overseas, by the House Judiciary Committee to ban "partial birth" abortions, and a series of votes on abortion in the House Appropriations Committee.

"Abortion activists will condemn these actions as the work of 'right-wing extremists' who oppose 'freedom of

choice," Quinn said. "But even a moment's serious reflection indicates how misguided such rhetoric really is. These measures chiefly have to do with getting the federal government out of the abortion business, ending policies by which government had actively promoted it."

The Medicaid amendment, proposed by Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., and approved on a 29-23 vote, would let states refuse to use federal Medicaid funds to pay for abortions in cases of rape and incest. States would still be required to pay for Medicaid abortions when the mother's life is in danger.

In a July 17 letter to Appropriations Committee members, Richard Doerflinger, associate director for policy development in the pro-life secretariat, said the amendment would "protect state laws and state constitutions on abortion funding."

Effort aiding families hurt by heat wave

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (CNS) — Catholic Charities USA has wired \$25,000 to Catholic Charities of Chicago to aid families suffering from the recent heat wave.

Chicago had some 400 heat-caused deaths, more than half the nation's total, in a week of oppressive heat and humidity that gripped much of the country in mid-July.

Most of the heat victims were elderly people living in poverty.

Some emergency funds are being used for fans. The rest is to be used to help poor families cover burial costs, to help pay high electric bills resulting from the heat wave, to provide counseling and outreach to affected families.

"Not only were many people too poor to afford air conditioning, but they lived in neighborhoods where they were afraid to open their windows," said Jane Gallagher, director of disaster response at Catholic Charities USA. "They were basically forced to shut themselves in and the temperature climbed to 120-130 degrees."

Congressional elimination of federal funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or LIHEAP, has many Catholic service agencies across the country concerned about more acute heating and cooling needs among the poor, said Sharon Daly, Catholic Charities USA deputy for local policy.

Mindy McPadden, director of government affairs for Chicago Catholic Charities, said that because of current limits on the federal home energy assistance, only 20 percent of the eligible population in Chicago has received assistance.

"This tragedy is just one more example of how desperately we need LIHEAP funds — year round," she said.

Catholic Charities USA is the nation's largest private social service network, with 1,400 local agencies and institutions, including the Catholic Charities agencies of dioceses across the nation.

EDITORS' NOTE: Donations may be sent to Catholic Charities USA, Chicago Heat Wave, 1331 King St., No. 200, Alexandria, Va. 22304. Those interested in learning more about the effort can call 1-703/549-1330, ext. 200.

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