

# WORLD & NATION

## Horror of war



**CNS/Reuters**  
An ethnic Croatian man sent to collect the bodies of 15 non-Serbian men shot dead in September and left lying in a meadow holds his nose because of the stench Oct. 16 near the city of Lukicl in Bosnia. Battle fronts in north-east Bosnia were calmer after Oct. 22 as a national cease-fire appeared to take hold.

## U.S. bishops issue statement addressing child sexual abuse

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Parishes can play a crucial role in preventing child sexual abuse and healing its wounds, says a statement issued Oct. 26 by two committees of the U.S. bishops.

The statement urges parishes to create an atmosphere of trust and safety that encourages victims, abusers or those who know of abuse to come forward.

Parishes should establish procedures to respond to reports of abuse and develop programs to teach people about sexual abuse issues, it says.

It suggests mentioning sexual abuse in homilies when appropriate and regularly printing in parish bulletins the name and phone number of an expert who can be contacted for help in dealing with a situation of child sexual abuse.

It discusses some of the signs of sexual abuse and some of the characteristics often found in sexual abusers. But it warns, "It is impossible to reliably identify potential abusers."

The statement, titled "Walk in the Light: A Pastoral Response to Child Sexual Abuse," was developed jointly by the bishops' Committee on Women in Society and in the Church and their Committee on Marriage and Family Life.

Three years ago the same two committees jointly wrote "When I Call for Help," a widely praised statement addressing domestic violence and urging parishes to assist battered wives.

Publication of the new statement was approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Administrative Committee.

"Any act of child sexual abuse is morally evil. It is never justified," the statement

says.

The statement defines child sexual abuse as any kind of exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of an adult.

It calls on the Christian community "to shatter the walls of loneliness, shame and fear that isolate those who are sexually abused," helping them to tell their story as a first step toward healing.

The statement follows years of work by the U.S. bishops — both as a body and individually in their dioceses — on the problem of sexual abuse of minors by priests.

"The National Conference of Catholic Bishops has established an ad hoc committee on sexual abuse by clergy to help church leaders take appropriate action," it adds. "Our dioceses have developed comprehensive policies concerning sexual abuse, which often apply to employees and volunteers as well as to clergy and religious. We are fully committed to preventing child sexual abuse and to restoring victims to health."

The statement says that sexual abuse of children causes deep spiritual scars as well as emotional, psychological and sometimes physical harm.

At several points the statement addresses the difficult issue of forgiveness of the perpetrator of sexual abuse.

"Justice plays a role in the forgiveness process," it says.

"We emphasize that the community, including the family, needs to call the abuser to accountability," it says. "We need to say: 'Abusive behavior is wrong and we hold you accountable for it. We will stand by you as you suffer the consequences of your behavior, but we expect you to acknowledge the harm done and to ask for forgiveness.'"

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