

WORLD & NATION

Pope: increase aid to migrants

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Warning of a new climate of suspicion and hostility toward immigrants in many countries, Pope John Paul II said the church should increase its efforts to be a "good Samaritan" to migrants and refugees.

"Migration, which once was seen as a factor of economic, social and cultural development for the host nation, is today increasingly felt as a burden, a disturbance and a problem," he said Oct. 27 to the members of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers, which met to discuss how the church can better protect the most vulnerable of the migrant population.

The pope said the host state has a right to react when faced with improper behavior or episodes of intolerance among immigrants. In these cases, public order must be maintained, he said.

But the overriding Christian response should be to reach out and give special help to these people, who are often without homes, jobs and protection, he said.

"The church knows it should assume ever more fully the role of good Samaritan, becoming a neighbor to all the excluded," he said.

This includes a wide variety of categories, he said.

Illegal immigrants, who eke out a living without the possibility of social support in host nations.

Refugees who were persecuted in their home countries but who have difficulty obtaining the protection afforded by international conventions.

Women lured away by disreputable expatriation agencies, then exploited and sometimes dishonored.

Children exploited in the sex trade, victimized by "those who go to exotic countries in search of adventures that can break up the boredom of a life made empty by vice."

Seafarers forced to make long voyages for meager pay.

Nomads forced to live on the margins of society because their presence in big cities "clashes with the silence that is often placed over their condition."

Experts decry anti-immigrant laws

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — A new wave of anti-immigrant legislation is making life more difficult for the world's refugee and migrant population, church experts said at a Vatican meeting.

From the United States to Europe to Asia, legal efforts driven by a widespread public backlash have resulted in expulsions, forced repatriations and a cutback in assistance programs, they said.

The experts encouraged church agencies to continue working with the most vulnerable of the migrant population, especially women, children and illegal immigrants, who often have nowhere else to turn.

The Oct. 24-27 meeting, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers, focused on the effects of what it called a major change in richer nations: passage from virtually open immigration to a "strict policy of closing frontiers and repressing illegal immigration."

Pope John Paul II told participants that migration is increasingly seen as a "burden, a disturbance and a problem," creating a climate of suspicion and hostility toward immigrants.

In the United States, U.S. bishops said, economic fear and political fallout have been the driving forces behind anti-immigrant measures.

Bishop John S. Cummins of Oakland, Calif., told the assembly that a "flavor of unwelcome for immigrants" prevails in the United States today. Legislation such as California's Proposition 187, which proposed severe restrictions on those illegally residing in the state, reflects a popular resentment as economic times have worsened, he said.

He said the Clinton administration has recently adopted an "aggressive" stance toward immigrants, increasing federal prosecution of illegal residents. Race and immigration are a growing theme in the 1996 presidential campaign, he said.

While immigrants are sometimes seen as a drain on the job market and welfare resources, their real-life experiences are full of immense difficulties, Bishop Cummins said. Non-European immigrants in particular face racism and poverty at home and harsh, often illegal, conditions at work.

"They may be forced to settle in urban neighborhoods under siege from drug

warfare and gang violence. There are stories of thousands of California residents becoming victims of telephone and telemarketing scams," he said.

He urged the church to keep responding to the survival needs of migrants, despite strained resources. It also needs to better promote among its own faithful a sense of welcome for outsiders.

"We often experience the angry reluctance of Catholics to follow what we see is clear teaching," he said.

Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York said in an interview that he thought the fate of refugees and migrants was reaching a critical point in the world.

"The whole cause of migrants is not easy to sell. It's kind of an out-of-sight, out-of-mind problem. But throughout the world in general, it's become a problem of suffering humanity," he said.

Cardinal O'Connor said the economic argument against immigrants is very appealing in the United States because jobs are at stake. This "tragically overrides in so many instances pure human needs and the right of every human for

survival," he said.

"But we are an enormously wealthy country. We literally should have no seriously poor people in the United States," he added. The bishops have to keep "begging and pleading" for others to recognize that a nation of immigrants should not turn its back on newcomers, he said.

Father Silvano Tomasi, secretary of the pontifical council, said the backlash against immigrants extends to many parts of the world.

"There's political controversy. It's enough to look at the newspaper headlines or watch television to see that there are demonstrations and very emotional electoral platforms centered on the presence of what is termed 'too many' foreigners," he said.

A final document approved at the meeting said that in the context of increased tourism, mass communications and a more globally connected economy, it appears inevitable that migration will continue to increase and "even the most restrictive policies against this flow will not have success."



Reuters/RNS

Protesting killing

Islamic Jihad activists call for revenge against Israel Oct. 30, during a protest rally after the Oct. 26 killing of Fathi Shakaki, the Islamic Jihad leader.

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