

WORLD & NATION

Pope urges resolution of Guatemalan civil war

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

GUATEMALA CITY — Pope John Paul II arrived in Guatemala Feb. 5 calling on the government and rebels "to stop the thunder of war" that has ravaged the nation for more than 35 years.

Do everything necessary to stop the fighting and "lead hearts along the road to greater justice," the pope said upon arriving at Guatemala City's airport for the first stop on a seven-day visit to Latin American nations.

Guatemala is the only Central American nation that has yet to sign a definitive peace accord to end its civil war.

"Even if the road toward peace has been hard and filled with difficulties, today rising on the horizon is the joyful moment of signing the accords that will put an end to the recent history of war and the violence that has lasted 35 years," the pope said.

At the welcoming ceremony, attended by Guatemala's bishops and President Alvaro Arzu, the pope said the war, along with earthquakes and other natural disasters, had prevented the progress and well-being of the country and its citizens.

Arzu took office in mid-January, promising that finalizing the peace accord would be his top priority.

At the airport, he told the pope, "we have sinned against each other, forgetting that we are brothers and sisters and forgetting he who gave his life on a cross for all."

But the Guatemalan people are contrite and repentant for having made their country "a nation bloodied by injustice and armed conflict," Arzu said.

Filled with remorse, he said, Guatemalans "beg from heaven that your presence will strengthen us and enlighten us to obtain and firm and lasting peace."

The pope told those at the airport that peace is "a gift of God and the fruit of dialogue, a spirit of reconciliation, a serious commitment to holistic development



Pope John Paul II greets two Guatemalan children upon his arrival Feb. 5 in Guatemala City. His seven-day trip also includes stops in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Venezuela. CNS/Reuters

along with solidarity reaching all sectors of society and, in a particular way, of respect for the dignity of every person."

The Guatemalan army and various militias, as well as rebels, repeatedly have been accused of human rights abuses, particularly against poor farmers and indigenous in the country's rural areas.

Despite ongoing problems, the pope said now is a

time of hope for all Guatemalans for "spiritual, moral, economic, social and cultural progress for all in such a way that everyone can live in a climate of freedom, mutual trust, social justice and lasting peace."

After a 1 1/2-hour flight and the arrival ceremony, the pope traveled by popemobile to the city's cathedral, driving 15 miles over a wildly decorated carpet of crushed flowers and plants.

Document targets effects of sexual revolution

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican's latest document on sex education, more than a critique of teaching methods, is a sign of the church's deep alarm over the "sexual revolution" and its effects on late 20th century society.

Issued in Italian Dec. 21 (and in English Jan. 22), the text immediately stirred controversy by calling on parents to regain control of sexual education for their children, if necessary pulling them out of school programs that do not conform to the church's teaching.

It listed both valid and objectionable teaching techniques for parents and instructors. But behind these "do's and don'ts" loomed a much larger issue, underlined by the document's authors in a little-noticed article published afterward in the Vatican newspaper.

Modern society has become so "erotized," so permissive and so sexually irresponsible that children simply cannot be trusted with our their sexual education, wrote Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo and Bishop Elio Sgreccia, the two top officials of the Pontifical Council for the Family.

In the eyes of Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, a Colombian prelate called to the Vatican in 1991 by Pope John Paul II, the problems began with the sexual revolution of the 1960s, spurred by the marketing of the birth control pill.

At first the idea of a "right to pleasure"

detached from responsibility seemed like a liberation to many young people. That mistake has caused lasting damage to the moral health of individuals and couples, he said.

But in Cardinal Lopez Trujillo's view, there was a wider political agenda at work here. He said that by using sexual freedom to break down the child-parent and family relationship, the sexual revolution's leftist authors were priming young people for "the real political revolution."

Things didn't go quite as planned, but the results have been disastrous anyway, he wrote. We now have children largely learning about sex through scabrous TV

shows and videos, erotic telephone services and sex-based advertising.

"All you have to do is open your eyes and look around," he said.

"Schools, he said, often approach the problem the wrong way, trying to provide merely scientific "health" information that ends up, in effect, apologizing for immoral behavior.

In a situation this dramatically bad, Cardinal Lopez Trujillo wrote, parents have no choice but to challenge poor sex education programs and make sure their children receive their main instruction at home. That's not a "cloister" mentality, but a first step toward a healthier future, he said.



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