

# 1998



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# WORLD & MISSION

## Pope, Albright meet over Kosovo

By Lynne Weil  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II and U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright expressed concern over the Kosovo region of Yugoslavia as the conflict there escalated.

The pontiff received Albright March 7 in the midst of her four-day swing through Europe to conduct talks on various issues, with Kosovo high on the agenda.

After his Sunday Angelus blessing March 8, Pope John Paul said he was "profoundly concerned by the dramatic situation in Kosovo, where explosions of violence once more threaten intensive efforts at dialogue and peace-making."

The pope called for a peaceful solution in Kosovo. The region was an autonomous province within Serbia until 1989, when its autonomy was revoked by Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic, now president of Yugoslavia.

In early March, Yugoslav police and military forces in Kosovo began cracking down on ethnic Albanians suspected of leading an armed movement for independence. Ethnic Albanians comprise an estimated 90 percent of the region's population.

At a joint news conference with Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini, Albright said Milosevic had been "spurning the offers of the United States and others" for mediation in the dispute. She said "decisive and firm action" against officials in Yugoslavia was needed to end the violence.

"We are not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with doing in Bosnia," Albright said. "We are not going to tolerate a return to the politics of divide and conquer."

A senior State Department official later said the United States was "appalled" that humanitarian aid deliveries to Kosovo were being blocked and international observers were being kept out.

Albright spent 30 minutes with Pope John Paul. Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls noted that the pair greeted each other in Polish, switched to Czech, and then spent the bulk of their



Reuters/CNS

Ethnic Albanian children, refugees from the village of Prekaz, cry after fleeing their home March 7 in Serbia's troubled province of Kosovo. Scores of terrified Albanians were hiding in woods around Prekaz after two days of heavy fighting with police.

meeting speaking in English.

Albright and Pope John Paul also discussed the pope's recent visit to Cuba, the Middle East peace process, ethnic strife in Africa, the promotion of religious freedom in China and "the responsibilities of the United States on the world scene," Navarro-Valls said in a statement.

U.S. State Department spokesman James P. Rubin told journalists Albright "also discussed America's efforts to illuminate the history of the Nazi period in Europe and to work with the Vatican to resolve the remaining questions about that tragic era."

Albright asked Pope John Paul for "his views about the prospect for change" in Cuba, Rubin said, and she "stressed America's desire to find ways to help the Cuban people without strengthening their repressive government."

The secretary of state also met for 45 minutes with the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, and Arch-

bishop Jean-Louis Tauran, the Vatican's foreign minister.

A senior U.S. administration official said that meeting covered many of the same subjects Albright had discussed with the pope, and particular emphasis was placed on events in the Persian Gulf and the Great Lakes region of Africa.

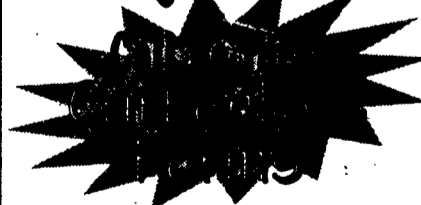
Albright also paid an hour-long visit to the San Egidio Community, the Rome-based lay organization that conducts reconciliation operations in various flash-points worldwide.

The group's head, Andrea Riccardi, said Kosovo was "topic No. 1" for Albright, but that she also showed interest in the community's peace-making projects in Burundi, Mozambique and Algeria, and its efforts at global interreligious dialogue.

Albright met also heads of state and foreign ministers of Ukraine, Italy, Germany, France and Britain during visits to those countries.

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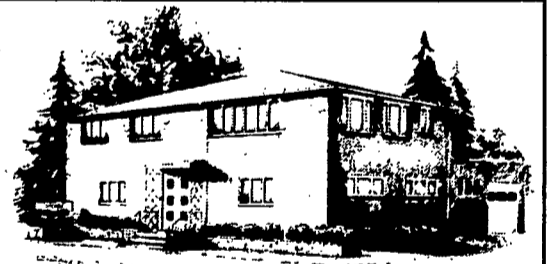


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