

Indian church leaders urge halt to nuclear tests

NEW DELHI (CNS) — Indian church leaders are urging India and Pakistan to forgo further nuclear tests to help prevent a nuclear holocaust in South Asia.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India was to take up the threat to South Asia posed by the nuclear arms race when the bishops' standing committee meets June 10-11, said the bishops' conference deputy secretary-general, Father George Pereira.

"We are worried because the smaller nations in the region are at the receiving end of a nuclear weapons race between India and Pakistan," he said. His remarks were reported by UCA News, an Asian church news agency based in Thailand.

Pakistan conducted six nuclear tests in

late May in answer to India's explosion of five nuclear devices May 11 and 13.

While the Indian government said it developed and tested nuclear weapons because it perceived Pakistan as a threat to security, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said his country responded in kind because "we fear India will attack us any time, any day."

The church in India "urges both countries to show restraint and embark on urgent measures to bring peace to the people of South Asia," Father Pereira told UCA News May 29.

"The church cannot afford to keep quiet when a nuclear holocaust looms large in the South Asian region," he said, adding that the bishops' conference

would issue a formal statement after the June 10-11 meeting urging both countries to stop building nuclear weapons.

"It is time for both nations to begin a new path of peace, dialogue and mutual respect ... before nuclear weapons annihilate the entire region," Auxiliary Bishop Vincent Concessao of Delhi told UCA News May 29.

"It is tragic that crucial economic and social development schemes have taken a back seat" to nuclear weapons in both countries, he said, adding that the Indian church is ready to support any bilateral peace talks.

Bishop Karam Masih of the Church of North India said both countries should "learn to show respect and humane con-

cern for millions of people in the region" rather than to enter the 21st century with weapons of mass destruction.

According to security analyst and columnist Swaminathan Anklaria Aiyar, the two South Asian nations, while basking in delusions of nuclear grandeur, are "close to mutual incineration."

"India and Pakistan need to reduce arms expenditures and nuclear weapons. Above all, they need to focus on becoming economically and socially stronger nations," Aiyar said.

Since the India-Pakistan partition in 1947, the two countries have gone to war twice over the Muslim-dominated, Himalayan region of Kashmir.

Pope accepts Florida bishop's resignation

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Acknowledging sexual misconduct with minors when he was a young priest, Bishop J. Keith Symons has resigned as bishop of Palm Beach, Fla.

Pope John Paul II accepted his resignation June 2 and named Bishop Robert N. Lynch of St. Petersburg, Fla., as apostolic administrator of the diocese until a new bishop is appointed.

In a written statement released in Palm Beach and Washington, Bishop Symons said, "Early in my now 40 years of priestly ministry, I was involved in inappropriate sexual behavior with minors. Realizing the gravity of my past actions, I have in succeeding years tried to live my promises of celibacy and chastity and have immersed myself in my ministry."

He added that he prays each day for those persons and their families.

"It is a memory with which we have lived far too long," he said. "I apologize to all whom I have hurt in any way and if, by this action, they might seek spiritual, emotional and psychological comfort and assistance, then this painful moment for the church and for me may prove to be beneficial."

Bishop Anthony M. Pilla of Cleveland, president of the National Conference of



Catholic Bishops, said: "The well-being of the whole church demands that her leaders not give, either by action or omission, any indication of tolerance of

inappropriate and abusive behavior on the part of those who serve in her name."

He called Bishop Symons' resignation "a difficult moment" but said, "All of our Catholic people must be able to approach the church with absolute confidence in the integrity of her ministers."

At a press conference in Palm Beach, Bishop Lynch said, "I hope immediately to begin a process of healing."

He said Bishop Symons "has asked for prayers and forgiveness and I have assured him of both."

"But I also wish in this moment to address anyone who might have been hurt by the bishop's actions and assure you that I stand ready to help," he said.

In a separate statement to the people of the St. Petersburg Diocese, where Bishop Symons had worked for 23 years as a priest and bishop, Bishop Lynch said, "Many have

wonderful memories of his presence here and will be saddened by today's news. We shall pray for the bishop. I also ask your prayers and support for me.

"Today's sad news," he added, "reminds us all of the fragility of humans, the weaknesses of church people from time to time, and the need for the presence of God in all our lives. Those who love the church will see in this moment an occasion for rededication and recommitment.... As church we are today tested, slightly bent, slightly broken, but we shall recover our equilibrium."

Bishop Symons, 65, marked the 40th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood May 18. He has been a bishop since 1981 and bishop of Palm Beach since 1990.

Born Oct. 14, 1932, in Champion, Mich., he moved to Miami in his teens and was ordained a priest of the Diocese of St. Augustine in 1958. He began serving the St. Petersburg Diocese when it was formed in 1968 and was made chancellor and vicar general there in 1971.

Named an auxiliary bishop of St. Petersburg in 1981, he was ordained a bishop March 19 that year. In 1983 he was made bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

Bishop Lynch, 57, was general secretary of the NCCB from 1989 to 1995 and has been bishop of St. Petersburg since 1996. He will continue in that post while administering the Palm Beach Diocese.

Mobs target Christians

FAISALABAD, Pakistan (CNS) — After a Koran was damaged in a hospital fire, Pakistan Muslims protested in the streets and stoned a Christian bishop's house while demanding that Christian hospital workers be charged with blasphemy.

Part of a copy of the Koran, Islam's holiest book, burned when a store-room of the civil hospital in Gojra caught fire, reportedly due to an electrical short circuit, reported UCA News, an Asian church news agency based in Thailand.

Blaming Christians for the incident, Muslims burned tires May 25 and a mob stoned the residence of Church of Pakistan Bishop John Samuel, demanding that Christians be arrested under Section 295-B of the penal code, which punishes blasphemy against the Koran with life imprisonment.

Bishop Samuel heads the Church of Pakistan's Diocese of Faisalabad but lives in Gojra, about 30 miles south of Faisalabad.

The affair underscored sentiments at a memorial service May 24 for the late head of the Faisalabad Catholic Diocese, Bishop John Joseph, who committed suicide May 6 in protest against the blasphemy laws and other discrimination.

Catholic Archbishop Armando Trindade of Lahore assured Christians at the service that the Joint Committee formed by the Catholic and other Christian churches would continue the struggle against the blasphemy laws that Bishop Joseph led.

After the bishop's suicide and the arrest of more than 600 Christians protesting Pakistan's blasphemy laws, Catholic and Protestant bishops announced coordinated efforts for minority rights.

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