

## Prelate: Religious freedom is a right

By Tracy Early  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Observance of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides "an appropriate opportunity to reflect upon and to emphasize the importance of religious freedom," according to the Vatican nuncio to the United Nations.

In a statement issued to mark the observance, Archbishop Renato R. Martino quoted a 1980 statement by Pope John Paul II that religious freedom "occupies the first place" among human rights and serves as "the guarantee of the others."

The pope has also asserted that "protecting religious freedom must remain the first duty of the state," the nuncio said.

But though some "commendable developments" have favored religious freedom, the world still sees "gross violations" of this right, he said.

Archbishop Martino issued the statement from the Vatican's U.N. mission in New York as part of the church's response to the anniversary of the declaration's adoption by the U.N. General Assembly Dec. 10, 1948.

Although the international community has repeatedly upheld the principle of religious freedom, in the U.N. Charter and other official documents as well as in the declaration, he said, a misunderstanding has sometimes led people to confuse "freedom of religion" with "freedom from religion."

The preservation of freedom of religion does not require "the erection of an impenetrable wall between religion and the state," he said.

While a formal relationship such as exists in state religions is not necessary, the state can serve the interest of its citizens by developing a positive relationship with religion, he said.

Archbishop Martino said this relationship required "the relaxing of a harmful principle of strict separation upon which some governments are based and which, in essence, exiles religion from the realm of public concerns."

In place of such harmful "strict separation," he called for "dialogue and cooperation" on matters of religious and social policy.

The nuncio made no direct mention of any particular country, but in one clear allusion to the United States he praised a court decision that the tape-recording of "matters of conscience shared in a religious forum was illegal."

In an action strongly protested by church



**An Indian Christian woman demonstrates in New Delhi Dec. 4 urging the government to curb rising incidents of violence against Christian believers. People took time off from their jobs and school to protest the rape of nuns, burning of Bibles and other attacks that religious leaders say reflect increasing intolerance under India's Hindu nationalist-led government.**

officials, prosecutors in Oregon secretly tape-recorded the confession of a prisoner to a priest in 1996. But the following year, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the taping was unconstitutional and a violation of religious freedom.

Among the "gross violations" of religious freedom, Archbishop Martino condemned the curtailment of public worship, religious teaching and media access.

In an apparent reference to Islam, he said religions themselves practiced religious intolerance at times, as in limiting the right of their members to choose a different religion.

"Should persons wish to follow their conscience in this regard, they are often subjected to such brutal treatments as being forbidden custody of their children, dispossessed of their property, imprisoned,

### Pope names diplomat as new nuncio to U.S.

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II has named the head of the Vatican's diplomatic training school to be the new nuncio to the United States.

The appointment of Colombian Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, president since 1995 of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, which trains Vatican diplomats, was announced Dec. 7 at the Vatican.

In Washington, the 68-year-old archbishop will succeed Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan, who was named Nov. 5 to be the new president of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, which oversees Vatican investments. Archbishop Montalvo, who will celebrate his 69th birthday in January, has broad experience as a diplomat in countries torn by violence and where church-state tensions were high.

From Latin America to North Africa, then on to Eastern Europe, Archbishop Montalvo promoted dialogue to end civil conflicts and urged recognition of the rights of the Catholic Church.

As head of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, the oldest diplomatic school in the world, Archbishop Montalvo directed not only its students' training in diplomacy and protocol, but also their spiritual formation.

The archbishop gained attention in 1984 for successfully mediating a dispute between Argentina and Chile over the Beagle Channel.

tortured and, in some instances, sentenced to the death penalty," he said.

Some governments adopt restrictive laws to "protect the monopoly of a particular religion over and against those perceived as foreign," he said.

These governments contend that their territory is "sacred to a particular religion" and no other form of religion can be tolerated, he said. "Yet these same religions expect and enjoy religious freedom outside their boundaries."

Making what seemed like a reference to China, the archbishop criticized "so-called official churches" that are subject to government domination and force people of faith to take their religion "underground."

Archbishop Martino called for "all of us" to help make religious freedom a reality by "standing in solidarity with those who are persecuted."

And he concluded by quoting a statement made by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan at a prayer service sponsored by the Vatican mission before the opening of the 1997 General Assembly: "Let us pray that the right to freedom of religion, set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, does not go unfulfilled."



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