

WORLD & NATION

Thousands of Kosovars flee attacks

By Jennifer E. Reed
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Relief workers in Albania and Macedonia expressed concern over meeting the needs of thousands of ethnic Albanian refugees fleeing Kosovo in the wake of NATO bombing raids and Serb military attacks.

As the Albanian government disbursed tens of thousands of ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo throughout the country, relief workers were scrambling to pre-position food supplies, said Charles Juhn, Catholic Relief Services' program manager for the refugee response in Albania.

In a telephone interview from Tirana, the Albanian capital, Juhn said March 29 that in two days some 72,000 refugees had arrived through the town of Kukes, a few miles inside Albania's northeastern border with Kosovo.

"We had an existing (food) pipeline and right now we're just pressuring the thing to triple the capacity," he said.

"It's a disaster over here, just a complete overwhelming number," he added.

"The Albanian government has done a terrific job of accepting the influx at Kukes and is beginning to distribute them throughout the country. ... We're starting to receive them now in Tirana. They're moving them just all over the place," he said.

Relief workers were hearing stories from the refugees "of men taken from families, people being robbed of all documents, money, jewelry ... being told that they have one hour to leave a town or area or they will not live to see the next day," Juhn said.

"The Kosovars we work with are expressing tremendous gratitude that finally something is being done relative to their situation," he added. "Every person in our



Reuters/CNS

A Macedonian soldier guides arriving Kosovar refugees across the border March 29. Refugees were flooding across the borders as the Serb army ordered people from their homes, often with just a few minutes' notice.

existing community has family members or acquaintances who have either been killed or are missing. The community is under tremendous stress, but they are extremely grateful" for NATO involvement.

In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, CRS workers were preparing for the possible swelling of the steady stream of ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo, said Julie Chen, CRS country representative. She said 15,000 registered refugees were already in the country, and some had arrived weeks before NATO bombing attacks on Yugoslavia began March 24. An average of 500 a day were arriving in Skopje, the Macedonian capital, she said in a telephone interview March 29.

While the world's concern turns to

Kosovo Albanian refugees, Chen said, people should not forget that many Yugoslav citizens, like Serbs in Belgrade who do not support Milosevic, are also suffering.

"There are a lot of innocent Serbian people that are suffering very much. We are in constant contact with staff in Belgrade, they are Serbs. They tell us their families are terrified," she said.

Many Serbs who oppose Milosevic are "quite angry" at the United States, she added.

"What's happening now has done more to mobilize support for Milosevic. ... It has given the population such a good reason to rally behind Milosevic and has set any internal process to bring him down back a long ways. Now he's very popular," she said.

Pope, diocese plea for peace

VATICAN CITY — Saying it is "never too late" for peace negotiations, Pope John Paul II urged a return to dialogue on Kosovo following five days of NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia.

Violence in response to violence is never an answer to a crisis, the pope said. He called for an end to bombardments and all acts of vengeance in the region.

At the end of a Palm Sunday Mass March 28, the pope said he "stands with the people who suffer, and cries out to all: It is always time for peace! It is never too late to meet and negotiate."

Addressing European parliamentarians the next day at the Vatican, the pope criticized the escalation of the Kosovo conflict.

"In response to violence, another violence is never a prospective way out of a crisis. Therefore it is proper to silence the weapons and end the acts of vengeance in order to enter into negotiations," he said.

Meanwhile, in the Diocese of Rochester, Consistent Life Ethic Coordinator Suzanne Schnittman declared March 25 that "the NATO bombing of Kosovo flies in the face of what the Diocese of Rochester believes about the sacredness of life and our efforts to protect it."

Reading a prepared statement at a vigil at the Federal Building in Rochester in response to the air attacks, Schnittman said, "The Rochester Diocese and Bishop (Matthew) Clark name advocacy for the Consistent Life Ethic as a priority. Affirming all life that is threatened by violence or war, we strongly oppose the action of NATO."



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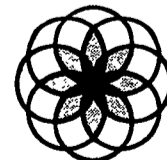
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