

WORLD & NATION

Pope, Catholic leaders press for Kosovo peace talks

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As NATO bombers stepped up air attacks against Yugoslavia, Pope John Paul II and other Catholic leaders pressed for a negotiated solution to the conflict in the Balkans. Meanwhile, an interreligious delegation, led by the Rev. Jesse Jackson, rejoiced at the release of three U.S. soldiers held captive by Yugoslavia for more than a month.

However, in Washington, U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen said the release of the soldiers would not halt NATO bombings.

"We are not only not going to stop the bombing, we're going to intensify the bombing," he said.

Hours after the soldiers' release, NATO air strikes on major electrical power plants caused a blackout in Belgrade and large areas of Serbia, affecting millions of people.

May 2, the day of the soldiers' release, Pope John Paul II appealed for the start of dialogue toward a negotiated solution, which he said should be undertaken with the "creativity and intelligence which God gave humans to resolve tensions and conflicts."

The pope also sent a message April 27 to Kofi Annan, secretary-general of the United Nations, offering his prayers for the success of Annan's late-April visit to European capitals and to Moscow in an attempt to reactivate a dialogue on the crisis.

In New York, Cardinal John J. O'Connor questioned whether NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia can be morally justified.

"It is enormously difficult for me to feel assured that the prosecution of this 'war' meets the requirements of 'just-war' teach-



Rev. Jesse Jackson walks with three freed U.S. soldiers across the Yugoslavian border into Croatia May 2. Jackson negotiated with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic for the release of Steven Gonzales (left), Christopher Stone (2nd left) and Andrew Ramirez (right), who were being held as prisoners of war.

ing," he wrote in his April 29 column in the archdiocesan weekly, *Catholic New York*.

Cardinal O'Connor, who served 27 years as a chaplain and rose to become chief of chaplains in the U.S. Navy, summarized many of the current arguments for the NATO operation: that tyranny cannot be allowed to prevail, that Serb actions in Kosovo are "reminiscent of the Holocaust," that many refugees are being produced and that

what is happening presents a "barbaric threat to all of Europe."

"For me, it is difficult to see how a single one of these issues satisfactorily answers the question of why we seem to be virtually obliterating a country," he said.

Msgr. Mario Zenari, the Vatican's representative to the permanent council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, urged a negotiated settlement

on Kosovo, based on the silencing of weapons, the return of refugees and establishment of an international peace-keeping force in the embattled Yugoslav province.

Msgr. Zenari made the comments during a meeting of the permanent council which met in Geneva April 29. He also appealed for a generous international response to the humanitarian needs of the hundreds of thousands of refugees and other victims of the war in Yugoslavia.

Meanwhile, Rev. Jackson, founder of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, and the Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, co-led the 19-member delegation of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Eastern Orthodox Christian leaders and one U.S. Congressman to Belgrade.

On April 30, Rev. Jackson and Rep. Rod Blagojevich, D-Ill., visited the three soldiers, who had been kept isolated from each other. The Rev. Jackson and Blagojevich negotiated with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic for the liberation of the soldiers.

Staff Sgt. Andrew Ramirez, 24, of Los Angeles; Staff Sgt. Christopher Stone, 25, of Smiths Creek, Mich.; and Spec. Steven Gonzales, 22, of Huntsville, Texas, walked hand-in-hand with the delegation's co-leaders as they left Belgrade for Croatia, from which they flew to the U.S. base in Landstuhl, Germany. The soldiers, members of the 4th Cavalry of the U.S. Army's 1st Infantry Division, were seized by Serb forces March 31 along Yugoslavia's border with Macedonia while serving with a U.N. peace-keeping force.

Pio

Continued from page 1

smiling Capuchin, and a wave of applause flowed through a massive assembly that stretched from St. Peter's Square more than half a mile down a wide avenue to the Tiber River.

Flags and placards identified groups of Padre Pio followers from as far away as Indonesia and Singapore, while sizable delegations came from Poland, Ireland and the United States. It was a demographically mixed crowd; an African nun sat next to a young man with a shaved head and sun-

glasses. Vendors sold Padre Pio medals, scarves, hats and other mementos.

"Padre Pio would probably be upset at all this fuss," said Paola Fontana, a 31-year-old Rome resident who became interested in Padre Pio several years ago. "What was striking about him was his personality. He could make people stop and think. And he had the stigmata — he seemed a step closer to Christ than most of us."

In his sermon, the pope said many people who knew Padre Pio directly or indirectly have rediscovered their faith, while hundreds of prayer groups inspired by his example have sprung up all over the world.

He said Padre Pio's international appeal flowed from his charity, which "was poured out like balm on the weaknesses and the sufferings of his brothers and sisters."

Padre Pio would often spend 10-12 hours a day hearing confessions. He also founded a large hospital complex for southern Italy's poor — a sign of the kind of compassion that is needed today, the pope said.

The pope gave Communion to an Italian woman whose sudden cure in 1995 from a ruptured duct in the neck was deemed a miracle. Doctors at the time said the rupture was potentially fatal, but it inexplicably disappeared one day after prayers were offered to Padre Pio.



Tourists pass a souvenir shop with statues, images, calendars and other Padre Pio tokens in the southern Italian village of Pietrelcina.

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