

WORLD & NATION

Catholic Daughters join SOA fight

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The national board of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas and the executive council of the AFL-CIO have passed resolutions supporting the closing of the U.S. Army School of the Americas.

The resolutions note that the training school for Latin American military leaders at Fort Benning, Ga., has been connected to human rights abuses by some of its graduates.

Both votes came within a few days of a 230-197 vote in the U.S. House July 30 to cut off the part of the school's funding that comes out of the foreign operations budget. A school spokesman said the action would affect about \$1.2 million of the school's \$4 million annual budget. The balance of the school's funding is in the Defense Department budget.

The amendment to cut funds faces a probable challenge when House and Senate conferees meet in September to work out differences between the two bodies' versions of the foreign operations budget.

The Catholic Daughters and the AFL-CIO join 120 U.S. bishops, 19 Latin American bishops and hundreds of other religious, labor, human rights, veterans and social concerns groups in resolutions urging that the school be closed.

The AFL-CIO's resolution said the SOA's "continued training of Latin American military officers in practices which have led to the violation of human rights is out of step with the emerging peace and democracy through the region." It called the school "a relic of a previous era of violence" that "undermines the credibility of U.S. government efforts" to promote development in the region.



Nancy Wiechec/CNS

Alice Ryan of St. Gabriel's Parish in Stamford, Conn., holds a banner advocating the closing of the School of the Americas during Mass on the steps of the Capitol May 2 in Washington. About 200 people opposed to the U.S. military school gathered for the service as part of a four-day protest that included demonstrations near the White House, Capitol and Pentagon.

The school and its supporters in Congress and the Pentagon say it does not teach torture and murder as military tactics and that it serves a valuable role in teaching democratic principles and fighting drug trafficking in Latin America.

In addition to the efforts to cut off SOA funding, there are bills in the House and Senate that call for the school to be closed. The Senate bill introduced by Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., has 14 co-sponsors. The House bill introduced by

Rep. Joseph Moakley, D-Mass., has 150 co-sponsors. With 180 co-sponsors, a bill must be put to a vote of the House.

The AFL-CIO council includes the 53 representatives of the 90 unions affiliated with the organization, which represents about 13 million workers.

The Catholic Daughters of the Americas is a lay women's organization with about 115,000 members in the United States and its territories and Mexico.

Brazil's bishops to join campaign against HIV

SAO PAULO, Brazil (CNS) — The Brazilian Catholic Church plans to join a national campaign to prevent spread of the HIV virus, which causes AIDS.

In an early August meeting with officials from Brazil's Health Ministry, representatives of the Brazilian bishops' conference said they would join the campaign but would not endorse the use of condoms.

A spokesman for the bishops' conference said its health office would be in charge of conducting the campaign to inform Catholics about what can be done to prevent the spread of the human immunodeficiency virus.

Spending bill draws fire

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The head of the U.S. Catholic Conference's Domestic Policy Committee and housing advocates are opposing a House appropriations bill they say inadequately funds the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In a letter to House members, Cardinal Roger M. Mahony of Los Angeles, committee chair, urged representatives to vote against the bill, which also would fund the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and independent federal agencies in fiscal year 2000.

"This appropriations bill presents the Congress with a genuine opportunity to let the Appropriations Committee — and the American people — know that the shelter needs of low-income families is a national priority," wrote the cardinal.

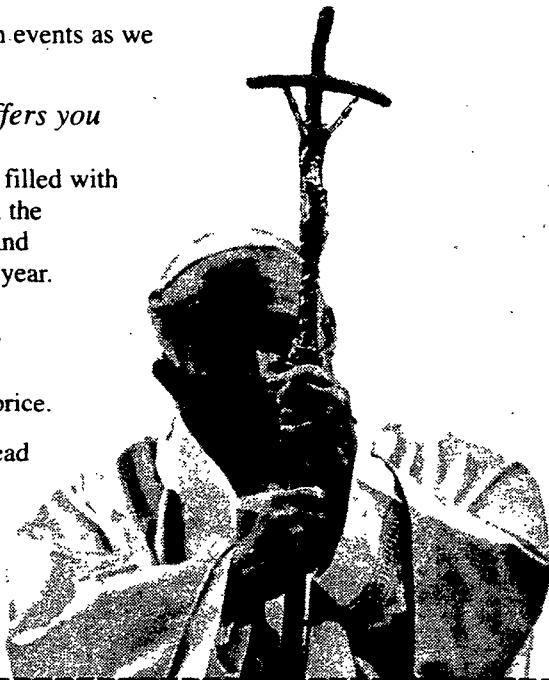
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Papal visit

Continued from page 1

The question of whether or not the pope may visit Hong Kong "should be a matter for the SAR government" to decide, the paper said, since this is not an issue that involves defense and security interests or foreign affairs.

It cited the Vatican's continuing diplomatic relations with Taiwan as the sole reason for the ban, but pointed out that these ties "are based on religious and not political considerations." China insists that any state with which it has formal diplomatic relations must have no such ties to Taiwan, which it considers a rebel province.

Hong Kong was one of the places in Asia proposed for Pope John Paul to visit later this year to present his apostolic exhortation and bring to a close the 1998 Synod of Bishops for Asia. In early August, India and Kazakhstan were being proposed as possible sites. The Vatican usually does not announce the pope's travels

until several weeks before he leaves.

On July 6, a spokesman for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs told UCA News that "as the Vatican maintains so-called diplomatic relations with Taiwan, obviously it is not appropriate for the pope to visit Hong Kong."

Earlier, Coadjutor Bishop Joseph Zen Zi-kun of Hong Kong told UCA News that it was not possible for the pope to visit Hong Kong.

The last papal visit to Hong Kong was by Pope Paul VI during a stopover Dec. 4, 1970.

Chang Hsin, senior researcher at the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, explained to UCA News in May that there should be no legal problem for the pope to visit Hong Kong.

Chang, an expert in Chinese constitutional matters, pointed out that there are precedents of officials from nations lacking diplomatic ties with Beijing visiting China. South Africa and South Korea sent delegates to the Chinese capital while still maintaining links with the Taiwanese government, he said.

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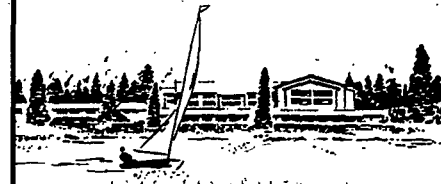
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