

# WORLD & NATION

## Amid violence, Timorese await results of balloting

DILI, East Timor (CNS) — The largely Catholic population of East Timor waited for the result of an Aug. 30 U.N.-sponsored ballot on autonomy amid a backdrop of ongoing violence.

On the day of the vote, an East Timorese worker for the United Nations was stabbed and killed, becoming the first U.N. worker to die in violence leading up to the ballot.

Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning apostolic administrator of Dili, appealed Aug. 30 to both the pro- and anti-independence camps to work together for peace.

"My appeal to the leaders is that they are able to convince their bases to accept the verdict of the people and to lay down their arms and help make political compromise ... for peace and reconciliation," he said.

About 95 percent of eligible East Timorese were believed to have voted, including Timorese living abroad in such places as United States, Australia and Portugal. Reportedly, voting was relatively peaceful, with heavily armed police standing guard along with unarmed U.N. police advisers at the 200 polling places in East Timor.

Results of the vote were not expected to be announced until a week afterward.

In a statement read at an Aug. 29 Mass in Dili, Bishop Belo had urged East Timorese to vote according to their consciences and to avoid violence. The bishop was out

of town celebrating a Mass for peace in Suai, an area wracked by months of militarily violence.

"Don't be afraid. Be brave and choose the future of East Timor," he said. "This generation will create history — and people all over the world will talk about us. They will talk about the brave warrior people and the brave hearted."

Bishop Belo had said he would stay with his people as the vote neared and violence escalated.

"The Vatican has entrusted the Catholics here to me, so I will never leave them, whatever the risk I face," he said.

On Aug. 23, he confirmed receiving a death threat, which said: "Be careful. For now your robe is white, but one day, it will be stained with your own blood."

Catechists and church workers were killed and attacked throughout the territory in the weeks leading up to the vote.

After a weeklong mid-August fact-finding mission in East Timor, U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern, D-Mass., noted that many of those opposed to independence would "prefer that the bishop not be on the scene. The threats have to be taken seriously."

Despite the May 5 agreement calling for a vote on East Timor's status, militias in the region continue to operate "with impunity," McGovern said.

The militias forced more than 60,000 East Timorese from their homes shortly be-



Reuters/CNS

Holding voter registration papers, East Timorese wait outside a polling station in Dili for the start of the U.N.-monitored vote on independence Aug. 30.

fore the voting, the Vatican missionary news agency Fides reported Aug. 30. Refugees were said to be hiding in the countryside.

Fides said that at Oekusi, in the eastern part of the island, armed pro- and anti-independence groups clashed, injuring dozens and burning 40 homes.

Pope John Paul II prayed for peace in Indonesia and East Timor Aug. 25 at the end of his general audience.

Speaking about East Timor, he prayed "that all its inhabitants and all others involved in the events of that territory" work sincerely for reconciliation and help heal historical wounds "with mutual respect and love."

Indonesian President B.J. Habibie has

said if the voters reject autonomy, Indonesia would consider granting the territory independence.

Portugal had controlled Indonesia for 400 years but abruptly left in 1975. Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975 and annexed it in 1976, although that annexation has not been recognized by the Vatican or the United Nations. A vast majority of East Timor's 800,000 people are Catholics. About a quarter of the population has died from fighting, starvation and disease under Indonesian rule.

Contributing to this roundup were William T. Clew in Worcester, Mass., and Stephen Steele in New York.

## Judge temporarily reverses decision on Ohio vouchers

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A federal judge in Cleveland Aug. 27 temporarily reversed a decision he made three days earlier halting an Ohio school-choice program. The program provides vouchers worth up to \$2,500 for Cleveland students to attend private or parochial schools.

In the new ruling, U.S. District Judge Solomon Oliver Jr. said elementary students who participated in the program last year may receive vouchers this year for the first semester or until a trial set to begin Dec. 13 settles the constitutionality of the issue.

However, some 587 students who were to join the program this fall will not get vouchers under the amended decision.

In a statement on the new ruling, Cleveland Bishop Anthony M. Pilla said the diocese very much regretted the exclusion of new enrollees, and added that there is no contingency fund available to assist them.

However, he said diocesan officials planned to meet Aug. 30 to "determine the precise number of new enrollees in

our schools and begin to discuss possible ways to assist those parents who desire to have their children remain in our schools."

In his Aug. 24 and Aug. 27 rulings, Oliver said the program appears to have the "primary effect of advancing religion" because most of the 56 schools accepting students with vouchers are religious institutions.

But, Bishop Pilla said, the judge continually has failed to recognize the true nature of the program. "The primary effect of the program is neither to advance religion nor to enable public dollars to flow to religious schools," he said in his statement.

Accepting voucher students actually represents significant additional expense for Catholic schools, he said, "since the voucher amounts to only 90 percent of the tuition charged" and that tuition — \$1,300 on average across the diocese — "is approximately \$800 less than the modest average cost of \$2,100 per pupil."

Cleveland diocesan spokesman Robert

Tayek told Catholic News Service that the balance — nearly half the annual diocesan cost of educating each child — is covered by parish subsidies.

Under the voucher program, the state provides up to \$2,500 in tuition money per child to poor families. As its fourth year began, the program was assisting 3,800 children from kindergarten through fifth grade, with 2,388 of them enrolled in 33 Catholic schools, according to Tayek.

He said only schools within the Cleveland city limits are participating in the four-year pilot program.

Oliver was roundly criticized over the timing of his first ruling. It was handed down the day most Cleveland Catholic schools opened and one day before the city's public schools began classes.

Leonard DeFiore, president of the National Catholic Educational Association in Washington, said the ruling made "3,800 children and their families pawns in a legal chess game."

"I can think of no more cold-hearted

decision for children, especially inner-city children who often have more than enough hurdles in life," he said in a statement.

The Ohio voucher law was challenged in court shortly after it began, but there never has been an injunction to stop it while the case progressed.

This May, the Ohio Supreme Court found procedural errors in the financing mechanism of the legislation creating the program, but said the program itself does not violate the Constitution.

State lawmakers quickly fixed the financing problems, and Gov. Bob Taft signed new legislation in July.

Tayek said supporters of the voucher program were hopeful that the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati would agree quickly to allow the program to continue.

Voucher proponents filed a request with the appeals court Aug. 27, asking that all students be allowed to continue in the program for the remainder of the year while the court case is decided.

## New testimony in murder of Guatemalan bishop points to army forces

SAN SALVADOR (CNS) — Testimony from a former member of the Guatemalan army has provided important evidence in the murder of Auxiliary Bishop Juan Gerardi Conedera of Guatemala City, investigators and church officials said.

"This is going to be a great help in clearing the crime up. It will help us piece together the whole jigsaw puzzle," Nery Rodenas, director of the archdiocesan human-rights office, told Catholic News Service Aug. 26.

Special prosecutor Celvin Galindo said, "Just when the possibility of resolving the case was seen with much skepticism, we are almost getting to the end of the road."

The information came in testimony given to the presiding judge in late August by Jorge Manuel Aguilar Martinez, former deputy head of services in the army-commanded presidential guard, known as EMP.

Rodenas said that Aguilar, whom he described as a "trustworthy witness," con-

firmed possible participation in the crime by officers belonging to the presidential guard and gave an "important version of what could have happened" the night Bishop Gerardi was murdered.

Church leaders have long believed that members of the presidential guard unit, renowned for its links to human-rights violations, were involved in the killing, allegedly in reprisal for the bishop's outspoken criticism of army actions during the 36-year civil war. The army refused to comment on the new testimony.

Rodenas said that the witness had approached the archdiocese "some months ago" offering his testimony "voluntarily," although he expressed "fear about the risks and consequences" of his testimony.

Under church protection, Aguilar and members of his family left Guatemala for an unknown destination early Aug. 27.

In his testimony, excerpts of which were reproduced in the daily *Prensa Libre* Aug.

27, Aguilar detailed the flurry of activity at the main barracks of the presidential guard just hours before Bishop Gerardi was bludgeoned to death April 26, 1998, outside his parish residence.

Aguilar, who served in the presidential guard for nine years, said that on that night he was in charge of controlling the entry and exit of vehicles from the military installation, which is located only a few blocks away from the bishop's house.

According to the newspaper report, confirmed by church lawyers, Aguilar related how "at 20:30 (8:30 p.m.) a red Trooper left (the barracks), carrying Maj. Francisco Escobar Blas, an officer called Galiano, and two other personnel belonging to the Service of Protection, formerly known as G2 (military intelligence)."

Aguilar said he was told by his immediate superior "not to note down" in that night's logbook any movements in or out of the barracks, and instead "just to answer

the phone."

He said that he was also told that part of the area around the barracks was temporarily a no-go zone.

Aguilar added: "At around 22:30 (10:30 p.m.) (another) vehicle came into the EMP, carrying Capt. Lima Oliva, another young man, and three others who had their faces covered with black ski-masks."

Shortly after, Lima left the barracks in another car with the head of the unit, Col. Rudy Pozuelos. Aguilar said that five minutes later an emergency call was received indicating "problems, or a danger situation" in the area.

According to forensic experts, Bishop Gerardi was killed between 10 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. as he got out of his car at the entrance to the parish house. Last year, lawyers at the archdiocese received an anonymous leaflet naming Lima, Escobar Blas and Pozuelos as co-conspirators in the case.