

WORLD & NATION

Vatican: Intervention in East Timor too late?

WASHINGTON (CNS) — After a week of bloodshed and repeated church calls for international intervention, the Indonesian government agreed to allow U.N. peacekeeping troops into East Timor.

The Sept. 12 move answered pleas from East Timor's two bishops, Pope John Paul II, and church leaders from several continents, but the Vatican newspaper questioned whether it was too late, since pro-Indonesia militias reportedly had killed tens of thousands of people and left some 200,000 homeless.

"What will remain of East Timor? What could be saved at this point?" asked the newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*.

Others, however, urged the peacekeeping force to begin work immediately.

A church worker in East Timor reported that on Sept. 13, militias were on the move again, burning property and shooting indiscriminately. The worker feared that unless U.N. troops arrived quickly, the militias would go on another killing spree.

"You go from hearing good news to hearing discouraging news," the worker said. "It keeps going back and forth, and it's pretty tiring, and we keep waiting and waiting."

U.N. Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. Sept. 13 that she had found overnight in Jakarta a "new atmosphere, a much more positive one" toward cooperating in work for humanitarian relief in East Timor.

Nevertheless, she said, the United Nations had to "look very quickly at assembling the evidence of human rights violations" and the "very serious terrorizing and forcible displacement of population, killing, and utter devastation of communities that has taken place in East Timor."

"I have been very shocked and troubled by the clear link that came up in every single version between the (Indonesian military) and the militia, and the complicity in many instances of the police and local authorities," she said.

Vatican Radio's program director, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, said in a commentary Sept. 13 that the Vatican was pleased that Indonesia agreed to accept outside intervention and that the church hoped that "deeds would follow words in the shortest time possible." The international force should be deployed "as rapidly and as effectively as possible," he



Reuters/CNS

Pedro Unamet Rodriguez, who was born inside the United Nations' peacekeeping forces — known as UNAMET — compound in Dili, East Timor, cries in his mother's arms. The child's family is among refugees taking shelter in the compound and he was named for the U.N. organization.

said. Bishop Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, who had called for international peacekeepers, termed the Indonesian decision a "courageous choice." The bishop, apostolic administrator of Dili, East Timor, spoke in Portugal, former territorial administrator of East Timor.

The next day he flew to the papal villa in Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome, to meet with Pope John Paul. The pope, who earlier had called for Indonesia and the international community to put an "end to the slaughter" in East Timor, was upset by what he saw as a campaign of terror against the church.

"I cannot hide my deep bitterness that all sense of humanity has once again been defeated, and that at the dawn of the third millennium fratricidal hands are being raised to kill and destroy without pity," he said Sept. 12.

"Again I express complete condemnation of the serious human rights abuses perpetrated in that territory, in the vain attempt to cancel the will expressed by the people and their legitimate aspirations," he said.

After more than 78 percent of East Timorese voted for independence Aug. 30, pro-Indonesia militias unleashed a campaign of terror against East Timorese, about 85 percent of whom are Catholic. They attacked thousands of people who had taken refuge in Bishop Belo's compound and burned his home, forcing him to flee to the home of Bishop Basilio do Nascimento, apostolic administrator of Baukau, East Timor.

When the militias attacked Bishop Nascimento's home, Bishop Belo was evacuated to Australia. Bishop Nascimento fled to the hills following the attack; his house, too, was burned to the ground.

After the incident, Bishop Nascimento told Portugal's RDP radio station international intervention was urgently needed or "the people of East Timor are going to die."

During an attack outside of Dili, mili-

amen killed the head of Caritas East Timor, Father Francisco Barreto. Four members of his staff reportedly were killed in an attack on a parish in Suai. Caritas Australia set up an East Timor Caritas office in Darwin, Australia.

The director of Jesuit Refugee Service in East Timor, 70-year-old Jesuit Father Karl Albrecht, was shot and killed Sept. 11 in a Jesuit residence in Dili. When intruders broke into the Loyola Jesuit Residence late at night, Father Albrecht heard a noise and took a flashlight with him to investigate.

Jesuit Father Ageng Marwata, superior of the Loyola community, said the intruders ordered Father Albrecht — who needs hearing aids — to turn off the flashlight. When the priest did not respond, the intruders fired at least three shots at him, including a fatal shot to the stomach.

Salesian Sister Marlene Bautista, an American who remained in East Timor through the anarchy and violence, urged people to "please keep praying for us."

"The sisters are firmly convinced that it's the prayers of the people of the world that have kept us alive. It's a miracle that we're still alive; we've had so many close calls," Sister Bautista said in a Sept. 10 interview.

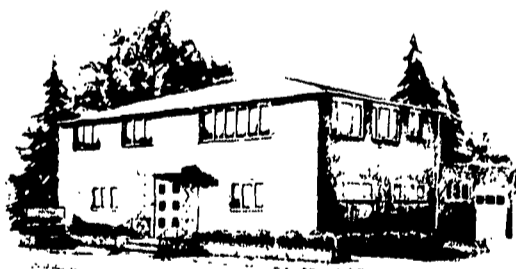
In a letter to President Clinton Sept. 9, Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, called for the immediate creation of a U.N. peacekeeping force for East Timor.

The bishop condemned what he described as "unmitigated terror" taking place in East Timor and urged Clinton to "take the actions necessary to save the lives of the suffering people in East Timor," saying that in their vote for independence, East Timorese "placed their trust in the great democracies of the world."

The day the letter was sent, Clinton announced he was suspending U.S. military ties to Indonesia. After the announcement that Indonesia would accept peacekeepers, Clinton said the United States would commit hundreds of soldiers, but not for combat.

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