

CONTINUED...

Civil war

continued from page 1

almost three-fourths of all civilian murders, according to various human rights groups.

Catholic Church workers, religious and clergy have been among those killed and persecuted by paramilitaries and also kidnapped by leftists who have given Colombia the dubious distinction of being the kidnap capital of the world. Forty percent of the world's kidnappings take place in Colombia, mostly by leftist guerrillas, according to several sources.

In fact, Father Francis Amico, CSB, a 1963 graduate of Aquinas Institute, Rochester, was kidnapped and held for four days in 1990 by leftist rebels who gave him propaganda literature to distribute when they let him go. The Basilian missionary still works in Colombia, but did not respond to an e-mail request for an interview.

Lopez's colleagues in Colombia thought that he would become a target of right-wing assassins if he stayed in Colombia too long after Cardona's murder. So he returned to the United States in late October 1996, and has since worked to publicize the plight of the Colombian people. Their plight, he said, is attributable in great part to the U.S. government's funding of Colombia's anti-drug war.

Earlier this year, the House of Representatives approved President Bill Clinton's request to give Colombia's government \$1.3 billion in aid to support its "Plan Colombia," a multifaceted proposal put forth by the Colombian government to fight the country's drug traffickers and leftist rebels. The package has been trimmed to \$1.1 billion and still awaits Senate approval.

The bill represents a more than three-fold increase in U.S. aid to Colombia, and supplies money for such items as 63 military helicopters; training of counter-narcotics battalions; eradication of coca and poppy crops, the sources of cocaine and heroin respectively; and the promotion of alternative crops for farmers. In the past, U.S. anti-drug aid was not supposed to go to Colombia's war against its rebels, though this restriction has been loosened in the last several months. In fact, several groups have documented the Colombian military's use of U.S. supplied weapons to deliberately kill unarmed civilians. Lopez sees Clinton's package as simply more money for a military that represses the people it is supposed to protect.

"The drug war is just a pretext for U.S. intervention," Lopez said. "The drug war has replaced communism as a pretext for controlling the country's affairs. ... As far as I'm concerned, the Colombian military is nothing more than a proxy army for the United States."

Coke, heroin, oil

Why should U.S. citizens, and for that matter, U.S. Catholics, care about a civil war in a Latin American country?

For one thing, Colombia — whose population is 95 percent Catholic — has a huge impact on life in this country, according to several sources. They note that between 80 and 90 percent of cocaine used here comes from Colombia. For that matter, much of the heroin in the United States comes from Colombia as well. Both critics and supporters of U.S. policy in Colombia — including U.S. officials — have pointed out that the left-wing rebels, the right-wing paramilitaries and military officials have made money off the drug trade, either through direct participation or by "taxing" or extorting money from those involved.

But drugs aren't the only thing Colombia exports. Currently, the Latin American country is the seventh largest supplier of oil to the United States, exporting more here than Kuwait, the nation over which the Persian Gulf War was fought. U.S. officials have openly acknowledged that they seek stability in Colombia because of its energy resources. For example, in a May 15 speech at an energy conference in La Jolla, Calif., Peter F. Romero, the U.S. acting assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere Affairs, cited Colombia as one of the nations whose drug trade this country seeks to eradicate because of its detrimental effects on the oil trade.

"Colombia faces multiple crises at the moment, including its worst economic decline in decades, as well as violence from guerrillas and paramilitaries, all of which is hurting its energy sector," Romero said, citing these crises as the impetus behind U.S. aid to Colombia's government.

The energy aspect of the war came home, in a sense, in January when eight people were arrested for sitting-in at the New Hampshire campaign offices of Vice President Al Gore. Gore owns stock in Occidental Petroleum Corp., which plans to drill for oil on Colombian land claimed by the U'wa tribe. The activists were supporting the tribe in its fight against Occi-



dental plans. The U'wa fear the establishment of oil pipelines, which in other areas have been attacked repeatedly by leftists — resulting in spillage — and which are protected by government troops who have persecuted local populations assumed to be helping the guerrillas, according to *Colombia Bulletin*, a quarterly published in Chicago.

The *Catholic Courier* contacted both the U.S. Department of State and the Embassy of Colombia in Washington, D.C., for comment.

The state department did not follow up with a planned phone interview in time for deadline, and the embassy did not return *Courier* phone calls.

Catholic views

The Colombian bishops have yet to take an official stance regarding the proposed Clinton aid package, according to Msgr. Hector Fabio Henao, an official with the bishops' conference and the national director of Colombian Caritas, the bishops' social welfare agency. Caritas works closely with Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' relief and development agency.

However, church leaders have already expressed concern about the aid's potential impact, Msgr. Henao reported via e-mail to the *Courier*. For example, the spraying of coca and poppy crops concerns the church because such eradication efforts are in the same areas where peasants grow subsistence food crops, he said. Instead, the church would prefer that money be spent on reducing demand for illegal drugs in the United States, and on drug crop alternatives.

Here in the United States, Boston Archbishop Cardinal Bernard Law, chairman of the U.S. bishops' International Policy Committee, echoed the Colombian bishops' stance in a March 16 statement on the proposed Clinton aid package.

"The crisis in Colombian civil society is, in good measure, due to illegal drug use in the United States," he said. "Over the long term, our country's greatest contribution could be the reduction in the domestic demand for these drugs, the result of policies of drug education, treatment and rehabilitation."

The cardinal also stressed that any military aid should be carefully monitored so that it not be abused, and that there should be major support for judicial reform, human rights protection and alternative agriculture in Colombia.

The Colombian Church is deeply involved in efforts trying to ameliorate the war's effects, and bring it to an end, Msgr. Henao said. Church leaders are serving as mediators in the ongoing negotiations between leftist rebels and Colombian officials, which began last year despite the lack of a cease-fire. The church has also been heartened by the massive peace demonstrations in Colombia over the last several months, protests that have brought 2 million Colombians into the streets of various cities calling for all sides in the war to end the fighting, he said.

Msgr. Henao also pointed out that the Catholic Church has worked to help the displaced civilians of Colombia, providing them food, medical care, schooling and employment training. Many farming families would prefer to return to their land, the priest said, but the civil war has rendered returning impossible in many areas.

Not all is gloom and doom in Colombia. For example, Jose Miguel Vivanco, executive director of the Americas Division of Human Rights Watch, testified before the Senate in February on the Clinton aid package, and pointed out that Colombia's National Police has discharged more than 11,000 officers who were implicated in human rights violations. However, he added that while human rights abuses by Colombia's military have decreased in recent years, they have increased significantly by the paramilitary units that supply intelligence to Colombia's army. He strongly urged that any aid to Colombia have stringent measures to ensure it not be used to abuse human rights.

Whatever their stance on aid to Colombia, concerned observers seem to share a desire that the United States make no moves that will escalate the country's civil war.

"No one can anticipate a speedy arrival at a political settlement," Cardinal Law said. "A conflict that has been years in the making will take more years still to conclude. Patience and commitment are required by all and no action should be taken by the United States or other parties to inhibit the process for a negotiated and just settlement of the conflict."

To learn more about what Catholic Relief Services is doing in Colombia, visit the agency's Web site at <http://www.catholicrelief.org/where/colombia/never.cfm>.

Colombia's civil war will be one of several Latin American topics to be discussed by the Rochester Committee on Latin America at its "Salsa y Salsa II — An evening of music, food and discussion" on Wednesday, June 7, at 7 p.m. in Downtown United Presbyterian Church, 121 N. Fitzhugh St., Rochester.

COURIER CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL

Announcements

ADOPTIONS The Catholic Courier does not publish adoption advertising. To obtain a list of agencies that serve birth mothers and adoptive parents, call 716-328-4340. Agencies wishing to be included on this list may send information to the Catholic Courier.

Merchandise

We buy all antiques & household goods for highest cash prices. One item or entire estate. Complete estate services. Appraisals, sales conducted.
Marilyn's Antiques
716-647-2480

GENERAL

Wanted to Buy

WANTED TO BUY: very old items; furniture, musical, military, mechanical, iron, brass, etc. Describe, 716-621-2649.

EMPLOYMENT

Moms & Dads
WORK FROM HOME
Raise your own kids, earn great money. We'll teach you how.
1(800) 431-7130

PROPERTY

Senior Housing

Charlotte Lake River Homes: 1 MONTH FREE. 1 Bdrm apts High Rise only. Rents start @ \$290 inc. For Seniors 50+ or disabled. 716/621-4890. Mon-Fri, 10:30-5. Supervised by DHCR, EHO. Offer expires June 30.

SERVICES

Carpeting & Floor Care

JAI CARPET CLEANERS: commercial/residential. Free estimates, referral program. Church discounts. "Have a cleanwright experience today." 716-243-5514; pager 716-528-0337.

SERVICES

Ceiling Repair

TEXTURED/SWIRLED CEILINGS: 9' x 12' ceiling only \$59! Water damage, drywall, plaster repairs. Any size patches or repairs. Quality work; reasonable prices. 716/392-5076.

Cleanup & Handyman

SITE CLEAN-UP: We clean attics, basements, garages, foreclosures, move in/out, haul away brush, construction debris and offer a full handyman service. Free estimates. Call Joe 716/281-1993 or 315/524-7985.

Driveways

Driveways
Parking Lots
Koppers Paving
Since 1965
35 Years Monroe County Area
FREE ESTIMATES
716-377-9000

SERVICES

Masonry

MASONRY REPAIRS: All types, brick steps, sidewalks, basement wall, repairs. Reasonable. 35 years experience. 716-323-1007. Al Meyvis, Sr.

Moving & Hauling

K-D Moving & Storage, Inc.
Experience in office, household moving and deliveries.
Big or Small, We do them All!
473-6610/473-4357
25 Arlington St. Rochester NY 14607
NYDOT#9657

SERVICES

Painting & Wall Covering

AL MEYVIS, JR.: Ext./int. painting. Basement walls repaired/painted. "Wet basement problems." Carpentry. Driveway sealing. All types small jobs welcome. Sr. discount. Certified: 392-4435 or 323-2876.

BURG-MASTER PAINTING/PAPERHANGING, textured ceilings, walls, ceilings repaired, rugs shampooed. Insured, powerwashing. Dan Burgmaster, 716/663-0827.

Plaster Restoration
Wallpapering Painting

Free Estimates
716-482-3243 • 716-703-8245
Terry & Nina McCullough
A Couple That Care

Call 716-328-4340 to advertise in the Courier classifieds