

## WORLD &amp; NATION

## Soldiers shoot at bishop's car at border point

By Judith Sudilovsky  
Catholic News Service

JERUSALEM — Auxiliary Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo of Jerusalem decried the shooting of his car at a border checkpoint as "dangerous, irresponsible and unjustified."

In a Jan. 10 letter to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, the bishop called the Jan. 9 shooting a "violent threat" against himself, the two priests and a nun who were traveling with him.

Israeli soldiers fired at the bishop's car, which carried a Vatican flag, as it tried to pass through a border checkpoint.

Bishop Marcuzzo, his secretary, Father Elie Kurzum, and Father Elias Odeh, parish priest of the Israeli Arab village of Shefa Amer, and a nun were driving to the West Bank village of Zababdeh to visit a sick priest when the shooting occurred. No one was injured in the Jan. 9 incident.

Father Odeh and the nun carry American citizenship.

"Such a treatment is inadmissible and irresponsible," Bishop Marcuzzo said in the letter. "The Palestinian territories are living an intolerable closure and hard isolation. The lives of priests and bishops are threatened in the accomplishment of their pastoral and humanitarian work."

Such behavior, he said, is a violation of the Fundamental Agreement signed between the State of Israel and the Holy See, which specifically gives religious leaders freedom of movement and activity for religious duties. In addition, he said, it is contrary to diplomatic regulations.

He asked for a strong condemnation from Israeli authorities and an official apology to the church. In addition, he requested that proper measures be taken against the soldiers responsible for the incident and that clarified instructions be given to officers and soldiers manning the checkpoints to "alleviate the measures of isolation in the Palestinian territories."

Bishop Marcuzzo said he was grateful for the visit and an official apology presented to him Jan. 10 by Israeli Justice and Religion Minister Yossi Beilin and Science, Culture and Sport Minister Matan Vilnai on behalf of the government.



Reuters/CNS

An Israeli soldier brandishes a pistol as he and his colleagues drag the body of a Palestinian man, Shaker Hassouni, away from the site of clashes in the West Bank city of Hebron Jan. 12. Hassouni, who had the pistol in his hand according to Israeli soldiers, was shot dead by Israeli forces after a hand grenade was thrown at the soldiers.

"They showed good understanding and good will to our requests. We are waiting for the practical application of their declarations," Bishop Marcuzzo said in the letter.

Father Kurzum, who was driving the car, said he approached the checkpoint, which was not manned by soldiers, at about 6 mph, zigzagging around a series of cement blocks, when some 165 feet away he saw soldiers running toward them from the adjacent military camp with their guns aimed at the car.

"I stopped the car when I saw they were pointing their guns — their M-16s — at us, and one soldier said to go back. He spoke in English so he knew we were in a foreign car. We had the Vatican flag and (foreign) license plates," said Father Kurzum.

He said the soldiers did not ask for their identity cards.

Father Kurzum said he then drove back a bit and stopped at the side of the road. It was at that point, he said, that the first shot was fired.

"It was very near to us. I heard it like it was in the car. I knew that he wouldn't shoot us directly, so I opened the window and told him in Hebrew to come talk to us. He said 'Get away from here or you will have a bullet in your head,'" Father Kurzum told Catholic News Service.

Another soldier fired two more shots at the car, the priest said, so he turned the car around and drove toward Zababdeh via another route.

"They have shot at Palestinian cars before, but this is the first time it has hap-

pened at a patriarchate car," he said. "Even if they didn't know we were from the Vatican, they saw the flag and knew we were representatives of somebody."

The churchmen stopped at another military camp along the way to report the incident to a commanding officer. The officer apologized for the soldiers' behavior and escorted the car to the village.

Father Kurzum said they told the officer they would be returning the same way, and the officer said he would speak to the soldiers.

At 4:40 p.m. they returned to the same checkpoint. Father Kurzum said he put on his emergency flashers to signal their approach to the soldiers, but the soldiers once again came out pointing their guns. The priest turned the car around and went a circuitous way back to Nazareth, where the bishop lives.

A statement from Beilin's office said he told the bishop he hoped there would be clearer instructions of conduct for soldiers regarding the passage of religious representatives so the incident would not be repeated.

The statement said the bishop asked to receive a copy of the investigation report when it was completed.

The Vatican issued no comment on the incident.

Father Raed Abusahlia, chancellor of the Latin Patriarchate, said although there have not been any other incidents of this gravity involving patriarchate officials, Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem has faced difficulties moving around Israeli checkpoints.

Once, the patriarch arrived an hour late for a Mass because he was forced to take a longer route due to problems at the checkpoints. Another time when the patriarch and chancellor were traveling to Nazareth via Jericho, West Bank, they were initially confronted by soldiers with pointed guns. After the soldiers saw their Vatican passports, they apologized, Father Abusahlia said.

"The daily life of every person here is already complicated, and this is making it more complicated. It is a situation of fear," he said, calling the incident an "unjustified action."

## Bishop Duan's death marks end of era for Chinese bishops

HONG KONG (CNS) — The last mainland Chinese bishop publicly appointed by the Vatican and recognized by the Chinese government died at age 92.

Bishop Matthias Duan Yinming of Wanxian died Jan. 10 after being hospitalized since last August, reported UCA News, an Asian church news agency based in Thailand.

His death marks the end of the line of bishops appointed by Pope Pius XII before the communist takeover of China in October 1949. Since then, the Vatican has not publicly appointed any bishops for the mainland.

Bishop Duan's funeral was to be held Jan. 15. His body was to be cremated and buried in the crematory of the Sacred Heart Church at Longbao, a suburb of Wanxian in central China, the vicar general, Father Ran Qiliang, told UCA News Jan. 11.

Coadjutor Bishop Joseph Xu Zhixuan,

84, has assumed leadership in the diocese, which serves tens of thousands of Catholics.

The flow of people honoring the bishop by filing past his corpse, praying and singing, was constant, reported Fides, news agency of the Vatican Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Several priests who had been with the bishop when he died said his last instructions to them were to maintain their commitment to pastoral work and to rebuilding the structures of normal church life.

Fides said the Chinese government issued a statement saying the bishop "made a great contribution to the country and the church. He was a personality loved and respected by all."

In 1998 Pope John Paul II invited Bishops Duan and Xu to attend the Synod of Bishops for Asia at the Vatican. However, the Chinese government rejected the bishops' application to leave the country.

Nevertheless, throughout the synod, two empty seats were reserved for them. Bishop Duan sent a message in Latin to the synod, thanking the pope for inviting them and expressing regret for not being able to attend.

Fluent in Italian, French, English and Latin, Bishop Duan had direct contacts with Pope John Paul through telephone and fax, and they exchanged greetings on each other's birthday.

On his 50th anniversary of episcopal

ordination Oct. 18, 1999, Bishop Duan told UCA News that he might never meet Pope John Paul but would send a souvenir to the pope — three wooden combs, a special product of Wanxian — through a Hong Kong delegate to India for the closing of the Asian synod.

Born Feb. 19, 1908, Bishop Duan was ordained a priest in Rome in 1937 after obtaining a master's degree in theology at Urban University. In June 1949, Pope Pius XII named him bishop of Wanxian.

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**Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580)**  
Vol. 112 No. 15, Jan. 18, 2001  
Published weekly except the last  
Thursday in December.

Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-  
year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada  
and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices:  
1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y.  
14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals  
postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes  
to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379,  
Rochester, N.Y. 14624.