

Catholic leaders condemn free trade policies

By Art Babych
Catholic News Service

OTTAWA — Despite violent clashes between police and protesters outside the Summit of the Americas in Quebec, a prominent nun said she hoped the message of the tens of thousands of peaceful demonstrators got through to Canadians.

The real message behind the protests was that "trade has to be fair, not free ... because free trade right now is free only for the few who benefit from it," said St. Joseph Sister Priscilla Solomon, a member of the Canadian Religious Conference.

Sister Solomon, who took part in the demonstration and in the parallel People's Summit, said the violence distracted from the goals of anti-globalization activists, "but only to the extent that there would be a gullibility on the part of Canadian people to accept that was really the message of the people's summit and the march."

"There are enough people in Canada that are conscientious and are able to discern or sort through and hear



Reuters/CNS

Protesters face off against a line of police near the free trade summit site in Quebec April 22.

the deeper truth that the 30,000 or 40,000 people were there to witness to," said Sister Solomon.

Parts of Quebec City were turned into a battlefield in skirmishes outside the perimeter of a 2.3-mile concrete

and wire fence erected to protect the heads of state of 34 countries as they met to discuss the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas April 20-22. Nearly 400 people were arrested.

Sister Solomon was a member of a Canadian church delegation that visited Mexico March 28-April 6 to study the impact of free-trade policies. The group of five, including Auxiliary Bishop Jean Gagnon of Quebec, reported witnessing "soul-wrenching human suffering" in barrios around the "maquiladoras," or foreign-owned factories, near the U.S. border.

"Our message," she said, "is that those are the very kinds of conditions that the FTAA would extend right across the continent. It cannot be allowed to happen."

Bill Fairbairn, South America coordinator for the Inter-Church Committee for Human Rights in Latin America, also took part in the alternative summit and demonstrations. Fairbairn said free-market policies "are really undermining people's democracy and people's futures by taking away powers from elected officials and giving it to transnational corporations," he said.

Catholic Courier

DIocese of Rochester, New York ■ VOL. 112 NO. 29 ■ THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2001 ■ 75¢ ■ 12 PAGES

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Whose rights prevail ?

On April 25, the U.S. House of Representatives was slated to vote on a bill that recognizes an unborn child as a separate victim in any assault on the child's mother.

Meanwhile, activists on both sides of the abortion issue are gearing up for the possibility of a U.S. Senate battle over abortion if and when Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor steps down as she is expected to this summer. President George W. Bush may present a pro-life candidate to take her place, and some pro-choice activists are calling for senators to filibuster to stop the confirmation of such a candidate.

Both scenarios highlight a current reality in the United States — despite the fact that abortion is legal, the battle over it continues. And it's a battle that, once again, highlights the unique tension of fetal vs. adult female rights created by a woman's pregnancy.

Mother, child

In the United States, a woman who carries within her an unborn child has a tremendous amount of power over the life of that child.

According to the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe vs. Wade*, for the first three months of a woman's pregnancy, the state has no right to interfere in its possible termination.

In the second trimester, the state may only interfere out of concern for the life of the mother — not the unborn child.

Only in the third trimester, when a fetus is able to live outside its mother's womb, may the state ban abortion.

Interestingly, though, in the 1989 *Webster* decision, the Supreme Court has also held that a state may enact a law recognizing that you are a human being from conception — as long as that law does not restrict abortion.

In essence, then, according to pro-life activists, U.S. law allows a woman for most of her pregnancy to determine whether her child is a human being worthy of being born, or someone whose life must be stopped.

Of course, those who fight to keep abortion legal see this power as an essential component of women's rights. If women do not have the right to abortion, such activists argue, they will forever be at the mercy of a society that may or may not support them and their children. They may also be at the mercy of men who may or may not take responsi-

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