

WORLD & NATION



Reuters/CNS

Taiwan typhoon

A man looks at his destroyed home on the east coast of Taiwan after Typhoon Toraji hit July 31. About 100 children attending a catechetical camp at a rural parish were trapped for days after storm damage cut off transportation routes.

New ambassador to promote peace

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Jim Nicholson said Aug. 6 that he sees his new job, U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, as an opportunity to collaborate in promoting peace, justice and human dignity around the world.

"We (the United States and the Vatican) share a lot of common goals and a lot of common concerns," the ambassador-designate said in a telephone interview with Catholic News Service.

"You know, the pope said that the Vatican is a willing partner in all efforts to build a world of genuine peace and justice for everyone," he said. "That's a goal totally consistent with that of our country."

Among common concerns, he said, are "important things such as religious freedom, human rights, democracy, the need to democratize those countries that are not yet democracies."

"Trafficking in people is a big issue, really throughout the world, and it's of major concern to the Holy See and the United States," he said. "That's where people are moved about and impressed into slave labor or prostitution against their will. That's a very serious matter."

Nicholson, a 63-year-old Catholic who headed the Republican National Committee from 1997 until earlier this year,

was to be sworn in as ambassador Aug. 10. He said he plans to leave for Rome Aug. 27.

He called globalization another major concern, noting that the pope addressed it when he and President Bush met July 29, following the Group of Eight summit in Genoa, Italy.

He said the Holy See's interest in the effects of globalization on the poor extends beyond fundamental human rights and dignity to "the opportunity for economic growth for those who have been cut off from it."

He cited the recovery of Eastern Europe from decades of communism as another area of concern. "I look forward to working with the Vatican on all issues of mutual interest, and especially (those) in Eastern Europe, where so many people have suffered so much," he said.

The pope has frequently spoken out against use of the death penalty in modern societies and has pleaded for clemency for a number of U.S. prisoners on death row. When asked about his own position, Nicholson said, "I feel that the death penalty is sometimes appropriate."

On such issues, Nicholson said, "I think part of my job will be to effectively articulate and explain the position of my government."

U.S. cardinal warns against politicizing WWII research

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Cardinal William H. Keeler of Baltimore has appealed for joint Catholic-Jewish research on Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust, unmarred by "a politically driven agenda."

In a three-page statement on the suspension of work by an international team of Catholic and Jewish scholars, Cardinal Keeler said, "Those who might wish to politicize this moment of pain should reflect on what is at stake in our effort to grapple together with our history."

He said the latest controversy shows "more clearly than ever that the work of reconciliation will be long and immensely challenging. Of crucial importance for the future must be the separation from scholarly research of elements of a politically driven agenda that poisons the atmosphere and makes true progress unattainable."

Cardinal Keeler, U.S. episcopal moderator of Catholic-Jewish relations, issued his statement July 27, shortly after it was revealed that the scholars had reached an impasse on how to proceed.

Four days earlier Seymour D. Reich, chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, publicized a letter to the Vatican's Cardinal Walter Kasper in which the team of scholars said it would have to suspend its work unless some new means of continuing it could be developed.

Cardinal Keeler expressed "sadness" that Reich "has released to the press the group's joint letter to Cardinal Kasper and used the occasion to misrepresent its content in his press release."

"Neither Dr. Eugene Fisher, Catholic coordinator for the group, nor the Catholic members of the team were consulted in this by Mr. Reich, and all three Catholics have firmly rejected it. It now seems more difficult than ever to see a way forward," Cardinal Keeler said.

The team of scholars was formed in 1999 by Reich's committee, IJCI, which appointed three Jewish scholars, and the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, now headed by Cardinal Kasper, which appointed three Catholic scholars.

The team's mandate was to examine the 11-volume historical study from Vatican archives, "Actes et Documents du Saint Siege Relatifs a la Seconde Guerre Mondiale" ("Acts and Documents of the Holy See Relative to the Second World War"), and report on their findings, including questions they regarded as unresolved by the published documents.

The team delivered a preliminary report to the Vatican last October. This June



Cardinal Kasper informed the group that access to the additional World War II Vatican archives it sought "is not possible at present for technical reasons." Vatican archivists have not yet cataloged

all the documentation from the pontificate of Pope Pius XII or that of his predecessor, Pope Pius XI.

Cardinal Kasper asked the researchers to develop a final report on their project, based on the published material they had already reviewed and responses to the group's questions by Jesuit Father Peter Gumpel, relator of Pope Pius XII's sainthood cause and a vocal defender of the pope's record in World War II.

Cardinal Keeler said problems already had developed last October when a European Jewish member of the group, Bernard Suchecky, "caused serious damage to the group's credibility by leaking its preliminary report. ... This event seriously impeded the work in progress, making it impossible for them to complete a critical phase of their research in timely fashion and diminishing the level of trust of the other members toward one of their number."

He said when the scholars responded to Cardinal Kasper's letter July 20, they acknowledged they could not achieve a full consensus on how to proceed at that point, but they offered "the hope that in dialogue with Cardinal Kasper they may yet discern a way forward."

With the latest events, he said, "the situation has become more problematic."

Cardinal Keeler reviewed the history of the scholarly study project and stressed that it had to be approached in an atmosphere of dialogue, freed of politicizing influences.

"One question to ask of any dialogue group is whether the members have been able to work through the differing personal and professional experiences they bring with them to the table, toward some measure of consensus," he said. "The preliminary report of this group indicates that they were able to do so on significant matters if by no means on everything."

He added, "Joint efforts by Catholic and Jewish scholars working together can bear fruit in the long run, provided the dialogue is conducted in a spirit of mutual trust and respect."

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