

# U.S. embassy in Rome draws vigil

ROME (CNS)—Members of religious orders from dozens of congregations and countries gathered outside the U.S. Embassy to Italy Sept. 24 to pray for peace and God's wisdom to enlighten world leaders.

Holding candles or banners, including one that said, "War is not the answer," about 120 religious men and women prayed and sang hymns for two hours.

The prayer vigil in Rome was sponsored by the justice and peace coordinators of religious orders with generalates in Rome in response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington and President Bush's pledge to crush terrorism.

"We are at a point in time when prayer and wisdom are very important for the decisions the leaders of nations are making," said Sister Catherine Arata, a U.S. member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame who

participated in the vigil.

Very few participants were U.S. citizens, she said, symbolically reflecting that "the whole world is involved and condemns terrorism, but that the response must not come from vengeance or revenge.

"I think the Bush administration and all governments are in a very hard spot—there are no easy answers—but they must find a way to respond without causing a major war," said Sister Arata, head of her congregation's commission on justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

"What happened Sept. 11 was terror—the blatant surfacing of evil," said Sister Arata. But the religious want people to remember that "that evil exists in other parts of the world, not so blatantly, but everywhere people are dying of hunger related to economic injustice," living in crushing

poverty or surrounded by conflict.

"Since Sept. 11, justice, peace and the integrity of creation have suffered a grievous wound," she said.

"How do we heal it?" the religious are asking themselves, she said. "How do we make those values priorities?"

Christian Brother Antoine de Roeper, a British participant, said the religious received permission from Rome city authorities to hold the vigil after promising not to attempt to enter the embassy, talk to embassy employees or block the road in front of the complex.

The vigil, he said, "was not a demonstration against the United States. We believe in peace and a government's right to protect its citizens, but we hope the response will not be motivated by vengeance."



Reuters/CNS  
A nun carries a poster in a candlelight vigil at the U.S. Embassy in Rome Sept. 24.



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## Pope stays on course

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

ASTANA, Kazakhstan — To many people, Pope John Paul II's visit



to Kazakhstan appeared ill-advised, dangerous or just plain irrelevant at a time of global crisis over terrorism. But to the pope, it was a natural step in a long-range mission.

It's not that the pope did not care about the threat of escalation between U.S. military and Islamic militants. At events Sept. 23-24, he pleaded for peace and condemned the use of religion to justify violence.

But as compelling as the U.S. tragedy was, the pope's agenda in Central Asia was far different, and his focus was wider.

"I come among you as an apostle of Christ and a witness to him," the pope told Christians and Muslims at his outdoor liturgy in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

While the world's attention was concentrated on terrorism and the "new war" of the 21st century, the pope was turning back to old solutions: the values of the Gospel.

The amazing thing was that, even in a Muslim region where some hear a fundamentalist fuse burning, the pope dared to evangelize. In a gentle but firm manner, he made it clear he came not only as an elderly pilgrim but as an energetic missionary.

"There is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ," he told his listeners in a country where Muslims are a distinct majority. Alternately quoting St. Paul and ancient Muslim poets of Kazakhstan, he said the "logic of love" held out by Jesus was the true meeting ground of both faiths.

At an encounter with young people, including many Muslims, the pope went further, saying he wanted to profess "with humility and pride" the faith of Christians.

"Religion itself, without the experience of wondrous discovery of the Son of God and communion with him ... becomes a mere set of principles which are increasingly difficult to understand and rules which are increasingly hard to accept," he stated.

The pope's words seemed carefully calibrated to the fact that, in Kazakhstan, many

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Reuters/CNS  
Pope John Paul II covers his face during the celebration of Mass Sept. 23 in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, where a large poster of the pope hangs over the crowd of 50,000. A Kazak girl (above, right) joins in the celebration; many Catholics held prayer books and rosaries.