

# WORLD & NATION

## As winter approaches, Afghans haunted by hunger

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The chronic problem of hunger in the world and the specific humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan drew words of warning from Pope John Paul II and a papal envoy in Pakistan, Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes.

In a Nov. 3 message to a U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization conference in Rome, the pope said that, following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the moral debate over rooting out injustice must not forget the most obvious injustice, global hunger.

He pointed out that food shortages affected the lives of millions of individuals, with serious consequences for global peace. His message was delivered to the international conference by Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican secretary of state.

"Following the terrible events of Sept. 11, a vast debate has arisen about justice and the urgent need to correct injustices," the papal message said.

"In a religious perspective, injustice is the radical imbalance in which man rises up against God and against his brother, so that disorder reigns in human relations," he said.

"The injustices of the world transform the earth into a desert, and the most striking of all these injustices is the hunger which millions of people suffer, with inevitable repercussions on the problem of peace between nations," he said.

The pope encouraged the international community to take the concrete mea-



Martin Lueders/CNS

**Afghan refugees wait for rations of wheat to be handed out at a camp near Peshawar, Pakistan, in mid-October.**

sures necessary to wipe out food shortages throughout the world, even when international events seem to discourage all efforts at relieving hunger.

The situation in Afghanistan is catastrophic, according to the FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture, with 7.5 million people "extremely vulnerable" and virtually the entire population of 23 million facing a shortage of food. The current con-

flict has disrupted relief, commercial imports of food and local farming, it said.

In a recent letter to the bishops of Pakistan, the pope called for practical relief for the countless number of refugees threatened by events in Afghanistan and prayed for a return to peace in the area.

Archbishop Cordes, who took the pope's message to Pakistan and visited refugee camps there, told Vatican Radio Nov. 3 that the church is among those try-

ing to provide aid and encouragement to the suffering.

When he visited a camp holding some 35,000 Afghan refugees, there was a palpable sense of depression among the inhabitants, the archbishop said, noting many feared the onset of cold temperatures and did not know whether they would ever get back to Afghanistan.

"The painful situation of numerous refugees demands immediate efforts on the part of those who are able to offer it," he said.

Following the terrorist attacks in September and after nearly a month of U.S. air strikes, Archbishop Cordes said he thought the situation in the Asian region was "explosive."

Asked about the debate between people who say the U.S. air strikes are morally justified and others who have urged a halt to the bombings, he said: "On one hand, I understand that this war, with its bombardments, is a continual challenge to human well-being, and above all I understand the fact that the frequent killing of innocent people is provoking very strong reactions.

"On the other hand, the church has never entered into these concrete decisions. I think I can say along with the pope that violence is never the Christian response to violence. This seems the proper view to me," he said.

Archbishop Cordes also said he had met with foreign missionaries in Pakistan following the killing of 16 people inside a Catholic church and found that the missionaries wanted to stay in the country.

## Archbishop states research possible but still unethical

By Scott McConaha  
Catholic News Service

MILWAUKEE — The fact that something can be done does not mean that it should be done, Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee told a symposium on stem-cell research.

"I know when you pick up the newspapers each day you see everything about the terrorist attacks and now anthrax," he said. "But I can assure you, if that hadn't happened we'd be on the front page every day, because stem-cell research is so important for the future of what's going to happen and what is happening in our society right now," he added.

The symposium, titled "Stem Cell Research: New Frontiers in Science and Ethics," was sponsored jointly by Jesuit-run Marquette University, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the Wisconsin Catholic Conference. It drew more than 70 scientists, philosophers and theologians.

Jesuit Father Robert A. Wild, president of Marquette, said the mid-October gathering was "an effort to bring people together with different ideas, different perspectives to try to reach the truth, to reach an understanding, or at least forward the search for the truth."

Among the speakers was M. Therese Lysaught, religious studies professor at the University of Dayton in Ohio and a former advisory committee member of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md.

She said embryonic stem-cell research,

which has been touted as a crucial step in finding cures for many diseases, is promoted in the media as the defense of innocent victims and the repelling of an attacker. She added that such a justification, much like that used in war, was not a valid argument for destroying embryos.

"Those who seek to develop therapies from human embryonic stem cells are characterized as fighting a just war, a war against suffering," she said. "The annual mortality (rate) of cancer ... is compared to the number of people killed in both the Kosovo and Vietnam conflicts.

"Advocates plan to sacrifice embryos for a revolutionary new kind of research. Parkinson's disease is likened to a dictator dreaming up the most nefarious chemical war campaign," she added.

Another claim is that "millions of people will suffer and die unless human embryonic stem-cell research is pursued," she said.

Such an approach is narrow and dismisses "the wide range of (medical research) endeavors that have been in process for decades. It ignores the possibility that other interventions might be developed that will ameliorate the suffering of those afflicted by particular diseases," she said.

To say that not pursuing embryonic stem-cell research will result in increased suffering and death creates a fiction, Lysaught said, because so much of the research bears so little clinical proof. She added that there is no moral criteria to "justify sacrificing the life of one not party to the conflict, even in order to save the life of another."

University of Pennsylvania bioethics professor Glenn McGee plunged into what he sees as several fundamental problems in the stem-cell research debate.

Among them, according to McGee, are the "lies" about the therapy opportunities presented by research on adult stem cells as being a morally acceptable alternative to treatments using embryonic stem cells.

"The data isn't there. There are no published articles. The claim that adult stem cells are better is a lie ... and it will only delay the debate on embryonic stem-cell research," said McGee, whose assertion was challenged by several conference participants following his remarks.

In addition, McGee, editor in chief of the *American Journal of Bioethics*, took issue with political and media debates, and advocates' bullish assessments of the progress and business of embryonic stem-cell research.

According to McGee, embryonic stem-cell research advocates have exaggerated the state of current research in the "entrepreneurial rush to market."

He noted that most stem-cell research in United States is currently being done by small companies "trading at below \$5 a share" and that any treatments resulting from stem-cell research are at least a year or two away, if not more.

Lisa Sowle Cahill, professor of theology at Boston College, told participants that the fair distribution of medical resources must be considered primary as the debate over embryonic stem-cell research continues.

"The Catholic standpoint stresses distributive justice and an inclusive view of the common good, as well as (paying) special attention to the disadvantaged. Ultimately, our key concern ought to be advocating for basic health care, and drawing the firmest line possible on the creation or cloning of embryos for research purposes," Cahill said.

She also talked about the argument many make that stem-cell research will alleviate suffering, but she said few have challenged that notion.

"The same generation of Americans

who support this research fail, as a rule, to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the alleviation of suffering," Cahill said. "We have done little earnestly to tackle the problems of child abuse or poverty. We allow our elders to deteriorate alone in warehouses."

Stem cell research "is not ultimately about the alleviation of suffering in general, it is about the alleviation of our own upper-class fear of suffering," she said.

### Pope beatifies eight

VATICAN CITY (GNS) — Those who dedicate their lives to prayer, sharing the Gospel message, helping the poor and defending human rights are living signs of God's love, Pope John Paul II said.

Beatifying eight priests and religious Nov. 4, the pope said those who live holy lives give witness "to the eternal and unconditional love of God for every creature."

During the Mass in St. Peter's Square, the pope and an estimated 25,000 people also prayed for peace, dialogue and justice in a world "shaken by violence" and marked by "social inequalities and injustices (that) provoke hatred, divisions and terrorism."

Among the eight newly beatified were two communist-era martyrs from Slovakia's Eastern Catholic community, which was outlawed by the communist government in 1949: Bishop Pavol Gojdic of Prešov, who died in Czechoslovakia's Leopoldov prison in 1960; and Redemptorist Father Metoděj Trčka, who died in the same prison in 1959.

"United in their generous and courageous service to the Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia, they endured the same suffering because of their fidelity to the Gospel and to the successor of Peter, and they now share the same crown of glory," Pope John Paul said in his homily.

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