

WORLD & NATION

Church leaders call for end to bombing

ROME (CNS) — As the U.S.-led bombing of Afghanistan stretched into its second month, some religious leaders and organizations questioned the efficacy of the military campaign while reminding world leaders of the need to provide aid for civilians affected by the war.

Pope John Paul II said the suffering in Afghanistan represents a "global emergency" that requires immediate relief.

"It is urgent that all necessary aid reaches the people of Afghanistan, the pope said.

At a Sunday blessing Nov. 11, the pope said that even as attention focuses on Afghanistan, people should not forget that "unfortunately, conditions of grave poverty and need persist in other parts of the world."

"Faced with these situations, extraordinary initiatives are not enough. The commitment to justice demands an authentic change in lifestyle, especially in the society of prosperity, as well as a more equitable management of resources in both rich and poor countries," the pope said.

Two days earlier, the French bishops called for the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan to end, and said it was time to try other ways of curbing terrorism.

"Increasingly violent bombardments are now striking Afghanistan, with the aim of destroying terrorist bases there," the bishops said in a statement issued during a plenary assembly in Lourdes.

"But the bombardments also create dead and injured among the innocent civilian population. They destroy resources. Fear is sending thousands of refugees to the roads or into the mountains," the statement said.

"A situation of war is spreading throughout the country. It is time to search for other methods, in order that evil is not added to evil and violence is not added to violence," they said.

While condemning the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, the French bishops said that peace is the fruit of justice



Reuters/CNS

Afghan refugee children sit in front of a tent in the Kumkishlyak camp in northern Afghanistan Nov. 9. Catholic Relief Services appealed for \$50 million for the immediate and long-term care of Afghan refugees and displaced persons.

and solidarity.

"The only battle worthy of humanity is the commitment of everyone, especially in our developed countries, to reducing the glaring inequalities between peoples, which is a matter of food, health, education, freedom, dignity and poverty," they said.

In a Nov. 11 statement, the president of the Conference of Italian Missionary Institutes, Father Gottardo Pasqualetti, expressed concern about civilian victims of

the U.S. air strikes and said "it certainly won't be bombs against Afghanistan that defeat terrorists."

Father Pasqualetti recommended more international police cooperation, as well as an investigation of economic backers of terrorism and establishment of an international tribunal to deal with such crimes.

French Cardinal Paul Poupard, head of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture, said Nov. 10 that the current situation represents not a war of religions, but a "war of barbarianism against civilization."

"The Muslims I meet are disoriented and scandalized by the horrible and sacrilegious use of Islam by (Osama) bin Laden to justify violence," he said.

After a meeting in Germany, the Catholic peace group Pax Christi International also called for an end to the bombing in Afghanistan, saying the allied powers should bring the terrorists to justice through established international law.

In statements issued in Washington, the president of the U.S. bishops' conference and the head of the bishops' Committee on International Policy called for increased protection of Pakistan's Christian community after an Oct. 28 attack at a Catholic church that left 16 people dead.

Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston, chairman of the international policy committee, said in a letter to Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's ambassador to the United States, that the attack on the Catholic church was a "tragic act of intolerance." He urged that more stringent measures be taken to protect the Christian community.

Meanwhile, Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' international relief and development agency, was delivering 176 tons of food to 70,000 Afghan refugees in the Jalozai refugee camp outside Peshawar, Pakistan, according to a Nov. 12 statement from the Rome-based Caritas Internationalis, an umbrella organization for Catholic aid agencies.

CRS begins relief effort for displaced Afghans

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Catholic Relief Services is seeking to raise \$50 million for the immediate and long-term care of Afghan refugees and displaced persons, the agency's executive director announced.

The agency needs the funding to provide for the needs of a portion of the estimated 5.5 million Afghans left vulnerable following the U.S.-led bombing of Afghanistan that began Oct. 7, said Kenneth F. Hackett, executive director.

CRS allocated \$2.5 million in new aid for refugee relief, but agency officials estimate that \$5.5 million was needed in immediate emergency aid, Hackett said.

"We have to get supplies in fast. This is an emergency, a substantial program, and we want to be there for the recovery," he said.

Hackett said the ability of CRS to assist needy Afghans will be due in large part to the generosity of Catholics in the United States.

"We are going to reach out to the people in need — and we are going to need a lot of help," he said.

CRS is hoping that U.S. Catholics will show the Islamic world that we're concerned," he said. The \$50 million will be used to fund programs over a period of 18-24 months.

Hackett said CRS has not yet prepared to initiate a national campaign to raise the funds because of the sensitive nature of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

"People are already stretched out this year," Hackett said. "That's a voluntary collection."

Bishop John H. Ricard of Fort St. Vrain, Colo., chairman of CRS' board of directors, wrote U.S. bishops about CRS' plan to respond to the needs of the displaced within Afghanistan and to Afghan refugees in neighboring countries.

CRS currently is assisting the construction of three refugee camps in Pakistan along the Afghanistan border. The agency through a local non-governmental organization it supports will be responsible for providing sanitation services and distributing blankets and tent material, Bishop Ricard said.

Hackett said CRS has a small operation in Afghanistan, supporting a staff of 10 people in Kabul. The operation had been larger, but all international staff were pulled in 1999 because of Afghanistan's internal strife.

Working with an Afghan non-governmental organization, CRS staff has arranged for the distribution of food, blankets and material for winter around Kabul, Afghanistan's capital.

Aid could reach up to 100,000 Afghans immediately, Hackett said. The agency hopes to reach 300,000 Afghans in the coming months; distribution should begin by mid-November, he added.

EDITORS' NOTE: Donations may be sent to Catholic Relief Services, 209 W. Fayette St., Baltimore, MD 21201-3443. Or call 1-800-736-3467, or visit the CRS Web site at: www.catholicrelief.org.



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