

# WORLD & NATION



Reuters/CNS

The father of Israeli soldier Nir Heftzadi, slain in a Palestinian suicide bombing, weeps at his son's funeral at the Herzl Military Cemetery in Jerusalem Dec. 2.

## Vatican will collect donations for victims of terrorism, war

By John Norton  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II said he hoped a churchwide day of fasting in December and an interreligious summit in January would help cool down the international situation, marked by multiple wars.

Meanwhile, the Vatican announced it was collecting donations that on Christmas Day the pope would allocate to victims of terrorism and war.

Speaking Dec. 2 to pilgrims in St. Peter's Square during a midday blessing, the pope noted the day's liturgy contained Isaiah's Old Testament prophecy that the nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares" and renounce warfare.

"These words contain a promise of peace that is more urgent than ever for humanity and, in particular, for the Holy Land, from where even today, unfortunately, sorrowful and worrying news reaches us," he said.

The pope was referring to a series of Palestinian suicide bombings Dec. 1-2 that killed at least 28 people and wound-

ed hundreds of others.

"May the words of the prophet Isaiah inspire the minds and hearts of believers and people of good will, so that the day of fasting Dec. 14 and the encounter with representatives of world religions in Assisi (Italy) Jan. 24 helps create a more relaxed and mutually concerned climate in the world," he said.

When he announced the day of fasting, the pope said he hoped Christians would find ways to transform their sacrifice into contributions for the needy.

The Vatican announced Dec. 1 that participants in the fasting day could wire their contributions to a specially designated bank account in Italy.

"The offerings collected will be allocated by the pope on Christmas Day to those victims of the consequence of terrorism and war who risk being forgotten now that the major emergency has passed," the Vatican said.

Contributions to the papal fund can be wired to Banca di Roma, ABI 3002 CAB 5008, Branch "Roma 204," account number 101010, "Pro Digiuno 14 Dicembre," using the name code "SWIFT: BROMIT."

## AIDS orphans Africans

By Bronwen Dachs  
Catholic News Service

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — African church officials noted their concern at the growing number of households headed by children as AIDS spreads at "an alarming rate" through the continent.

Not only has AIDS killed many millions of Africans, but it has halted development on the continent, the secretaries-general of regional and national bishops' conferences in Africa said in a press statement after a Nov. 26-Dec. 1 meeting in Cape Town.

The secretaries-general met under the umbrella of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar to discuss a theological and pastoral response to AIDS in Africa.

Households headed by children "are becoming all too common," they said, noting that this results in an increase in child labor and the loss of family values.

"The local church communities and individual Christian families are called to open their hearts and doors and become more and more part of the family of the AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children," the statement said.

AIDS "contributes to widening the gap between rich and poor," the statement said, noting that the disease is "therefore undermining social and economic security and has resulted in unprecedented trauma to millions of people."

The church "needs to address the place of women and children in society, particularly as they are the most affected by the pandemic," the statement said.

"Some men in Africa hide behind culture in their degradation of women," it said, noting that "men must be encouraged to respect women and to acknowledge their major role in society."

An overwhelming number of children have been orphaned by AIDS on the continent, the secretaries-general said.

"The number of street children and child dropouts are growing at an alarming rate," they said, noting that "this has contributed to the increase in crime."

"The church must take a leading role in fighting AIDS at all levels" in order to fulfill its "role of being the voice of the voiceless and hope for Africa," the secretaries-general said.

They called on the church to become "a true family of God characterized by solidarity, empathy and compassion."

Church leaders should "teach their followers through action" and "come up with concrete programs that focus on sexual health education, behavior change and HIV/AIDS counseling in order to link prevention with care and support," the statement said.

The bishops' secretariat should "take up the role of advocacy and networking with the international bodies and pharmaceuticals on behalf of the church on African continent," it said.

## Pontiff promises prayer, support

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II promised the millions of people suffering from AIDS in the world that the Catholic Church prays for them, will help them and supports the search for a cure.

"Dear brothers and sisters ill with AIDS, do not think you are alone. The pope is near to you with affection and supports you in your difficult journey," the pope said Dec. 1, the U.N.-declared World AIDS Day.

Pope John Paul made his remarks during a Vatican meeting of Catholics who volunteer in various areas of health care.

In his remarks about World AIDS Day, the pope said, "Following the example of Christ, the church considers assistance to the suffering a fundamental component of its mission and feels personally challenged by this new sphere of human suffering."

Pope John Paul said Catholic health professionals and volunteers are entrusted with the task of helping those who are in pain experience the love and consolation of Christ.

Even in countries with the best medical care and government-supported social services, volunteers are needed to give a soul to services for the sick, the disabled and the dying, he said.

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