

Rebels force cannibalism

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Cannibalism is not part of Congo's culture, but reports that rebels have eaten their victims or forced others to eat family members shows the depths of depravity the four-year civil war is reaching, said the bishop of Butembo-Beni, Congo.

The United Nations is investigating the reports "and we hope that the world will realize what is happening here; every day new crimes are discovered," Bishop Melchisedec Sikuli Paluku told Fides, news agency of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

The U.N.'s Congo mission has been investigating reports that in November and December at least a dozen members of the country's

Pygmy people were cooked and eaten; members of the Movement for the Liberation of Congo rebel group have been accused of the crime.

Bishop Sikuli Paluku said: "It is affirmed that MLC warriors forced family members to eat their own relatives."

The rebels use cannibalism "to provoke terrible fear in their foes and pave the way to dramatic success in the battlefield," Father Apollinaire Kighoma of Mangina, Congo, told The Associated Press.

Bishop Sikuli Paluku insisted cannibalism is not a cultural ritual of any of Congo's ethnic groups; the practice, like all wartime atrocities, comes from evil in the human heart, he said.

Fides also quoted a Xaverian missionary, Father Silvio, who recently returned from Congo, as saying, "It is true that some older people remember that there was a tribal custom to eat a piece of the adversary's liver; it was thought to be a way to assume his power."

"But in the present case we see a desire to destroy the enemy, eliminate him from the face of the earth," Father Silvio said.

After four years of war, starvation and more than 2 million deaths, he said, ethics and all sense of proportion are being lost.

"This sort of news should make us reflect on the terrible evil of war which brings man to commit such atrocities," the priest said.



Reuters/CNS

A Pygmy family is among those who have fled Congo in panic amid reports that rebels forced cannibalism and carried out other abuses.

Diocese says ex-pastor is being investigated

Pending the results of an ongoing investigation into alleged sexual misconduct, the Diocese of Rochester has restricted the faculties of Father Robert W. Hammond, former pastor of St. Margaret Mary Parish in Irondequoit.

According to a diocesan statement, the investigation began after the diocese received information that Father Hammond allegedly engaged in sexual misconduct during the 1970s. When the investigation is complete, the results and recommended action will eventually be

forwarded to officials in Rome, the diocese said.

The restrictions on his priestly faculties mean Father Hammond is not permitted to perform any sacramental function, except in danger of death, nor may he celebrate Mass publicly.

Father Hammond is currently unassigned, having resigned the pastorate at St. Margaret Mary in August 2000 to address "personal concerns," according to the diocesan statement. These concerns were not related to criminal activity or be-

havior, the diocese stated.

Father Hammond was named in a \$40 million abuse lawsuit filed in November against St. Patrick Parish in Owego, as well as the diocese, Bishop Matthew H. Clark and the Holy See. The suit was filed in federal court by James Insko, a California resident and a former St. Patrick parishioner. Also named in Insko's suit was Albert H. Cason, former copastor of St. Patrick, whom the diocese had removed from ministry in 1985 due to allegations of sexual misconduct.

Michael Tedesco, diocesan spokesman, said it is diocesan policy to not comment on lawsuits.

Father Hammond was ordained in 1967. He served as assistant pastor of Holy Trinity in Webster from 1967-71 and of St. Michael Church in Newark from 1971-73. He directed Teen Seminar from 1973-79, and was chaplain at Notre Dame High School in Elmira from 1979-80. He then served as assistant pastor of St. Anne Church in Rochester from 1980-82; Holy Ghost in Gates from 1982-83; and St. Cecilia in Irondequoit from 1983-87. Prior to being assigned to St. Margaret Mary, Father Hammond was pastor of St. Mary Parish in Bath from 1987-98.

— Rob Cullivan

Diocese asks to have case dropped

Several weeks after codefendant Robert O'Neill was dismissed from a sexual-abuse lawsuit, the Diocese of Rochester has refiled its motion to have the suit dismissed.

Paul J. Yesawich III, lead attorney representing the diocese, made his motion Jan. 29 to State Supreme Court Justice Robert Lunn. The motion will be heard March 13.

Yesawich had originally filed a motion to dismiss on Nov. 11, 2002. He refiled because two plaintiffs were subsequently added to the suit, bringing the total number to 10, and because the plaintiffs' complaint had been amended, thus nullifying Yesawich's first motion to dismiss.

The plaintiffs claim that O'Neill, who retired from full-time priestly ministry in June 2001, committed sexual misconduct against them in the 1970s and 1980s, when all the plaintiffs were minors. Three men filed the original lawsuit against O'Neill and the Rochester Diocese in June 2002, and five more men were

added as plaintiffs in August.

In his amended motion, Yesawich said the complaint should be dropped against the diocese because:

- The lawsuit was not filed before a three-year statute of limitations expired, which would have been on the plaintiffs' 21st birthdays. Yesawich noted that all of the plaintiffs turned 21 between 1982 and 1993.

- The lawsuit's claim that the diocese was vicariously liable for O'Neill's actions is not valid. Because the case against O'Neill was dismissed by Lunn on Dec. 12, 2002, Yesawich stated that the plaintiffs no longer have any primary liability upon which to attach a claim of vicarious liability against the diocese.

- The plaintiffs' claim of "fiduciary fraud" is not valid because the plaintiffs suffered no financial loss. "To the extent plaintiffs argue that they have sustained loss of earnings and earning capacity, or damages relating to future psychological treatment, those damages are specula-

tive and, therefore, not compensable," Yesawich stated in his motion to dismiss. Yesawich also charged that the only reason the plaintiffs filed a fraud charge is that, if found to be valid, it would allow for a longer statute of limitations.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark removed O'Neill, 66, from all ministry on May 2, 2002, due to allegations that he had committed sexual abuse in the past.

— Mike Latona

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