

PARTIAL-BIRTH ABORTION BAN ACT INTRODUCED

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The spokeswoman for the U.S. bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities praised the introduction of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 in the U.S. House of Representatives.

"Partial-birth abortion is never necessary and has never been accepted by the mainstream medical community," said Cathy Cleaver. "It has no place in a society that cares for women and children."

Rep. Steve Chabot, R-Ohio, introduced the bill Feb. 13 with more than 100 cosponsors. The House has passed bills to ban partial-birth abortions four times, twice with Senate approval, but President Clinton vetoed it both times. President Bush supports a ban.

VATICAN OPENS SECRET PRE-WWII ARCHIVES

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The early opening of Vatican archival records related to Vatican-German relations immediately prior to World War II has garnered more media attention than scholarly interest, an official at the archives said.

The Feb. 15 opening of records in the Vatican Secret Archives was announced a full year earlier, but as of Feb. 14 only two dozen scholars had requested access, said Marco Marini, secretary of the archive's prefecture.

The material detailing diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Germany from 1922 to 1939 consists mostly of correspondence, not internal Vatican documents; scholars already have had access to many of the German government's copies and originals.

SECABUSE CLAIMS

DEEMED UNSUPPORTED

ST. PAUL, Minn. (CNS) — St. Paul, Minn., Archbishop Harry Flynn said Feb. 12 that retired South Dakota Bishop Paul Dudley has been returned to active ministry.

An eight-month investigation of sexual abuse claims against him revealed no supporting evidence.

"I now consider the complaints against Bishop Dudley to be closed and resolved in his favor," the archbishop said in a written statement.



Reuters/CNS

Pope John Paul II greets Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz at the Vatican Feb. 14. At his private meeting with Aziz, a Chaldean Catholic who requested the meeting, the pope asked Iraq for "concrete commitments" to respect U.N. disarmament resolutions.

Pontiff, Iraqi official meet

John Norton/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Warning of the disastrous consequences of war, Pope John Paul II and top Vatican diplomatic officials met with Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and asked Iraq for "concrete commitments" to respect U.N. disarmament resolutions.

Aziz, a Catholic of the Chaldean rite, met privately with the pontiff for about half an hour Feb. 14, then proceeded to a 45-minute meeting with Cardinal Angelo Sodano, secretary of state, and Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, the Vatican's equivalent of foreign minister.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the meetings "allowed a broad exchange of views on the noted danger of an armed intervention in Iraq, which would add further grave sufferings for those populations which are already tried by long years of embargo."

In a statement, he said Aziz, who requested the meetings, assured the church leaders "of the Iraqi government's willingness to cooperate with the international community, particularly in regard to disarmament."

"For its part, the Holy See underscored the necessity of faithfully respecting, with concrete commitments, the resolutions of the

Security Council of the United Nations, guarantor of international legality," Navarro-Valls said.

The meetings came amid heightened U.S. warnings that time was running short for Iraq to demonstrate concretely its willingness to disarm. Later in the day, top U.N. weapons inspectors delivered an important progress report to the Security Council on Iraqi compliance.

At an evening press conference in Rome, Aziz said he told the pope and Vatican officials that a Western-led war against Iraq would provoke negative reaction in the Arab Muslim world and "poison" Christian-Muslim relations.

If traditionally Christian countries in Europe side with the United States, he said, "it will be interpreted by the Arab and Muslim world as a crusade against Arabs and against Islam."

Aziz said European nations should stand firm against America's "imperialist ambitions" and its ultimate desire to "colonize" Iraq and reshape the Middle East according to U.S. and Israeli interests.

"This war is unjust, it's immoral, it's illegal, and nobody should participate in it," he said.

He said he thanked the pope for the Vatican's consistent statements against military strikes and relayed

a message from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein assuring him of Iraq's willingness to cooperate fully with U.N. weapons inspections.

Asked about the Vatican's insistence that Iraq make "concrete commitments" to comply with the United Nations, Aziz said active, concrete compliance was already Iraqi policy. He said the true "outlaw" country was the United States because it had violated Iraq's sovereignty — guaranteed by U.N. resolutions — by setting up no-fly zones in Iraq without explicit Security Council approval.

Aziz's visit in Rome was carried out under extremely tight security. Italian police closed a section of road near the Vatican ahead of the arrival of his armored motorcade, and dozens of uniformed officers stood along the route.

During his stay, Aziz also met with Italian government ministers and members of Parliament.

Meanwhile, a papal envoy arrived in Iraq Feb. 11 ahead of an expected weekend meeting with Saddam. Carrying a personal message from the pope, retired French Cardinal Roger Etchegaray said he was trying to convince Iraq to show full cooperation with international inspectors and to convince the world to press ahead for peaceful solutions.