

# Catholics, Iraqis hail power transfer

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican's top foreign affairs official hailed the transfer of power to an Iraqi provisional government, saying Iraq "can only be governed and understood by its own people."

Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, an assistant secretary of state, said the success of the Iraqi government will depend largely on its ability to ensure political freedom, restore basic services and crack down on "cowardly acts" of terrorism.

The stakes in Iraq are high, he said, because the outcome "could determine the development of democracy in the whole region."

Archbishop Lajolo made the comments in an interview with Catholic News Service June 28. The same day, the United States handed over sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government headed by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, formally ending a 14-month occupation two days ahead of schedule.

Archbishop Lajolo said a "simple ceremony" will not be enough to ensure the success of the transition. The interim government starts with some handicaps, including the lack

of grass-roots support, he said.

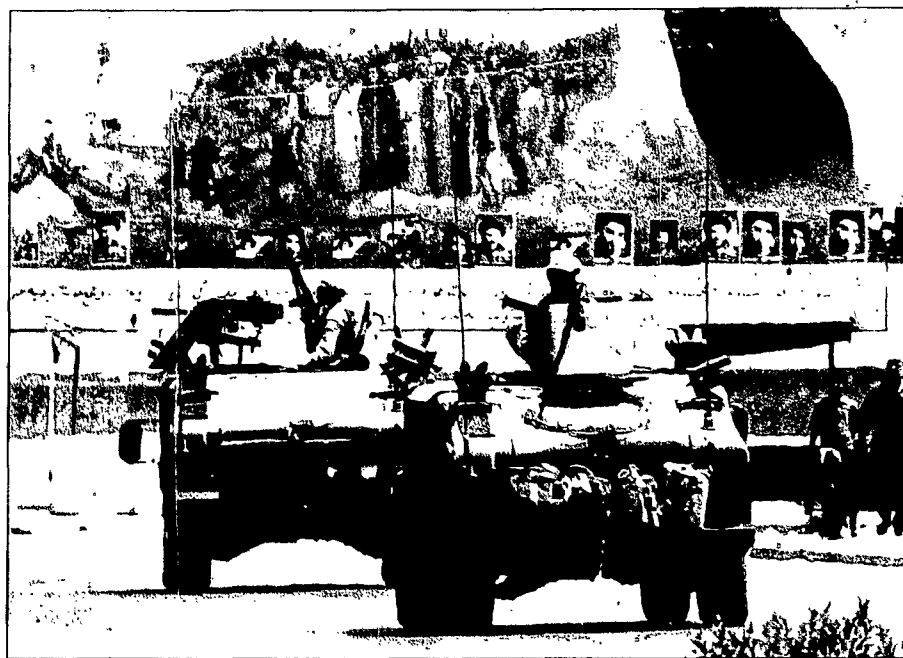
"The government will need to ensure that the political parties in the country are given the possibility — with adequate freedom — of participating in the running of the nation," he said.

The government will also need to make certain that Iraqi national forces under its own control and the coalition forces "achieve a tight control of its territory, in order to ensure security," the archbishop said.

According to Catholic and other Iraqis, transferring power to an interim government will eventually bring stability to Iraq and curb the escalating violence by terrorists determined to derail the transition.

"Iraqis are taking their destiny into their hands and will collaborate better with the interim government — which represents the country's largest ethnic groups — than with the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council," Bishop Ibrahim N. Ibrahim said in an interview.

The bishop is head of the Michigan-based Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle for Chaldean Catholics in the eastern United States.



Reuters/CNS

**U.S. troops patrol near a Shiite Muslim religious billboard in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad June 4. The U.S. transferred power to an interim Iraqi government on June 28, two days earlier than planned.**

U.N. special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi has appointed Ghazi al-Yawar as interim president, Iyad Allawi as prime minister and a 35-member council of ministers to govern Iraq.

In July this group will name some 1,000 Iraqis to select a 100-member national council to advise the ministers and prepare for national elections scheduled for January 2005.

Elected officials will create a transitional government to draft a constitution and hold elections for a permanent government by the end of 2005, according to a U.N. plan backed by the United States.

Sam Kosa of St. Michael Catholic Chaldean Church in El Cajon, Calif., believes that educated Iraqis in his homeland "have endured so much torture and imprisonment they will see the interim government as a way of changing their life. Insurgents will not deter the will of those who want freedom."

However, Kosa noted obstacles that the new government could face: lack of acceptance by Iraqis because of the U.N.-appointed members, and attempts by Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds and Christians to advance their own political positions, instead of working for unity.

A San Diego County resident who works as an interpreter in Iraq for the Department of Defense believes that 90 percent of Iraqis will consider the interim government legitimate.

Basile Qozi believes that insurgents, excluded from power they once held under former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, will continue to attack U.N. and Iraqi security forces.

Qozi, a member of a Syriac Catholic church in Oceanside, Calif.,

spent the past year in Iraq as interpreter for a U.S. officer working with the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Toma' Khoshaba, who represents the Assyrian Democratic Movement in Baghdad, Iraq, said that the ongoing mortar attacks and deadly car bombings in and near Baghdad indicate security is still questionable and he thinks elections should be postponed.

Iraqis have never before voted and must be educated in the process and assured that all ethnic and religious groups will be represented in the new government, he said.

The estimated 140,000 American troops still in Iraq and the 10,000 there from other countries should remain as long as the Iraqi government and the U.S. military agree on the need for their presence, with the U.N. functioning as a broker in the decision, Khoshaba said.

"There will be a normal struggle because democracy in Iraq is new," but the success of the new government will depend on whether the economy and security will improve, noted Kosa.

In Baghdad, the head of Chaldean Catholics, Patriarch Emmanuel-Karim Delly, said the handover marked a turning point for Iraq.

"We're pleased at this transfer of power to its legitimate proprietors, the Iraqi people," he told Asianews, a Rome-based news agency run by the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions.

"It's a day of celebration and a memorable day. All Iraqis are happy. There are certainly some violent people who will create problems, but we hope sooner or later they will be convinced that all this is for the good of the Iraqi people," he said.

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