

Pope calls for action to save dying Africa

by Linda de Hoyos

Pope John Paul II has used an eight-day tour of three West African countries—Senegal, Guinea, and Gambia—to draw the world's attention to the necessity to halt the ongoing economic genocide in Africa.

In a speech before diplomats in Dakar, the capital city of Senegal, on Feb. 21, the pope called upon the advanced nations to act quickly to save the African continent. According to Reuters, the pope said he was gravely concerned about starvation and drought in Africa, which is threatening millions, particularly along the continent's east coast. "Malnutrition is still dramatically widespread. . . . Mutual aid is carried out, but it is slow and difficult. Something must be done and it must be done soon," the pontiff stated.

Defeat the 'structures of sin'

Africa is the worst victim of the policies of the International Monetary Fund and of what the pope called "structures of sin" in a 1987 encyclical. In his speech in Senegal, the pope added that even debt reduction and providing new credits to African nations would not be enough now, given the damage that has been wreaked on the continent. "It is time for the human family to become aware of its real duties," he said.

The pope sounded the same theme in a sermon in Banjul, Gambia. "Africa is finding it difficult to meet the old challenges of poverty, hunger, ethnic rivalries, and the new challenges of materialism, the tragic spread of AIDS, and the deadly onslaught of the drug culture. . . . I ask the developed nations to give assistance wherever it is needed, but also to share their know-how, technology, and skill, so that Africans themselves can be the principal artisans of their own advancement."

This, of course, is the type of technology transfer which is prohibited by the malthusian dogmas that dominate the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and most advanced-sector governments. Since the writing of the U.S. National Security Council's National Security Study Memorandum 200 under Henry Kissinger in 1974, the systematic denial of technologies to the Third World, including Africa, has been a doctrine of U.S. national security.

The pope, however, called for a "new era of solidarity

with Africa," and said he was renewing his appeal "to those governments in a position to help and to international organizations to hurry to Africa's side in this decisive hour."

The 'aberration of slavery'

The pope also decried what he called the "aberration of slavery" during a visit to the island of Goree, off Senegal, which was the major transshipment point for African captives to the slave markets of the Americas and Europe. "From this African sanctuary of black pain, we implore forgiveness from heaven," the pope said.

Standing before a slave shipment building on the shore, the pope held a seven-minute silent prayer and then said: "Here what comes most to mind is injustice. The drama of a civilization which called itself Christian. . . . Those men, those women, and those children were victims of a shameful trade, which was carried out by people who were baptized but did not live their faith. . . . How can one forget the enormous sufferings, the contempt for the most basic human rights inflicted on the populations deported from the African continent?" He called slaves "unknown victims of an unrecognized crime," and then noted, "Unfortunately, our own civilization, which calls itself Christian, has recreated this situation even in this century. . . . We know what concentrations camps were like."

Call for religious tolerance

The pope chose to visit three predominantly Muslim countries, at a point when British intelligence networks are working to foment religious warfare between Muslims and Christians throughout the northern half of Africa. Speaking to Muslims in Ziguinchor, Senegal, from a cathedral sacristy, the pope said that "there is no justification for the discrimination based on race, religion, sex, or social condition." He said that religious leaders have the duty "to help believers unite to build peace."

In Conakry, Guinea, the pope passed by thousands of cheering crowds, most of them Muslim. In 1967, Guinea had nationalized Catholic schools and expelled all foreign missionaries, and Catholics make up only 2% of the country's population today. The pope praised the current government's effort for "reconstruction" after the dismantling of the regime of Sekou Touré, after Touré's death in 1984.

In Banjul, Gambia, the pope further called upon all the nations of the region to help end the civil war in Liberia. "A terrible fratricidal war has ravaged that country and caused immeasurable suffering among its people. I am deeply disturbed by the plight of hundreds of thousands of refugees, and so many homeless and hungry people. Such a situation destroys any chance of economic development and political stability for the people involved." In his speech to diplomats in Senegal, the pope had called upon the neighboring countries to "accept refugees, control the growth of armed groups, block the supply of weapons and impede their transit."