

Vatican by Denise Henderson

Pope: World must not forget Africa

In the midst of the turmoil of Eastern Europe, to not feed Africa is "criminal indifference."

Pope John Paul II issued an appeal to all nations of the world and to all humanity during his tour of five of Africa's poorest countries: "I pray you: do not treat hungry Africa with contempt but help it," he urged while in Burkina Faso Jan. 31. "It is necessary that the world know that Africa is facing a very deep poverty: resources are shrinking, the earth is becoming sterile, malnutrition is chronic for dozens of million of people and too many children are dying. How is it possible that such a miserable situation is not felt by the whole of humanity?" asked the Pope.

"Once again I have to launch a solemn appeal to all humanity in the name of all humanity," he continued. "How will history judge a generation that has the means to feed the whole human population but opposes this commitment out of criminal indifference?" Pope John Paul II called upon the people in each nation of the North to pressure their governments to act immediately in solidarity with the poor countries.

The Pope also called on journalists who have not covered his current African tour, to spread his appeal to save Africa. The ominous silence by the press reflects a clear decision by oligarchical financial powers to abandon Africa and the Third World sector to death.

On Jan. 30, Pope John Paul II said, "I passionately call on all the world to support you who know the weight of poverty," to crowds who turned out for a mass at Bobo-Dioulasso, a dusty railroad town in western Burkina Faso. "I also ask you not to

be discouraged," he added. The Sahel region has been made into one of the poorest regions in the world, through two decades of International Monetary Fund "conditionalities" imposed on African nations as part of its genocide and looting policy.

The pontiff, nearing the end of a tour of poverty-stricken sub-Saharan Africa, believes it is an act of divine Providence that he has been given the chance of reviving interest in Africa at a time when it risks being forgotten because of turmoil in Eastern Europe. Vatican spokesman Joaquín Navarro Valls quoted the Pope as telling local bishops Monday night that he could not have died in peace without launching his appeal to the world's conscience.

About 30,000 people packed the square in front of the station and lined approach roads. A large sign at the station read: "Welcome to the pope, leader of the Vatican and friend of the Sahel."

"The leitmotif of the journey is to underline to the world that there are not only problems in Eastern Europe but here too," explained Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls. "Poverty, the legacy of colonialism, health, security, dignity, the lack of a future."

On his last trip in 1980 the Pope had launched an appeal for funds to help the Sahel, in the spirit of Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, in which the theme taken up was "Development is the New Name for Peace." Even then, the effects of the policies of the international bankers could be seen in the form of

drought and the encroaching desert.

Other themes which the Pope emphasized throughout his tour, included the need to improve Christian-Muslim relations, the moral importance of the family, and, for adolescents, resisting the seduction of drugs and sexuality.

While in Chad, the Pope called on the citizens of that nation to cast aside "fratricidal indifference" and help Africa. "I hope that this peace will be consolidated . . . in a persistent search for forgiveness and reconciliation," the Pope remarked in a plea to both Muslims and Christians. And in an address to Malian bishops, he said, "Muslims are bearers of authentic religious values which we are called to recognize and respect." The Pope called for respectful dialogue with Moslems despite severe opposition, prejudice and a refusal in some Islamic countries to recognize freedom of worship for Christians.

At a mass in Burkina Faso, the Pope stressed, "It is normal to respect and have respected human life in every stage of its development to natural death." He added, "We must guarantee the stability of the family and allow couples to live a responsible maternity and paternity, resisting the invasion of those methods which go against the dignity of the woman and which do not honor man."

Speaking in Chad, where church marriages are infrequent and polygamy is common, the Pope preached the importance of a faithful Christian marriage. "The worthy and serious undertaking of marriage excludes the possibility of divorce and taking away the life of an already conceived baby," he said. In addressing the young people of the region, the Pope warned that while young people must "face the plagues of modern times," they must resist "the seduction of drugs and misunderstood sexuality."