

Franciscans issue appeal on Balkans

In the name of 1,400 Franciscans in Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, and Slovenia, the message excerpted here was sent to the United Nations, the U.N. Security Council, and the European Parliament. Dated Sept. 16 from Zagreb, Croatia, it is entitled " 'Might Is Right' Principle Confirmed: A Threat to the World." The statement was issued by the Conference of Southern Slavic Franciscan Provincials, and is being circulated by the Christian Information Service in Zagreb.

Dear Sirs:

As Franciscan provincials who have witnessed with abhorrence the death of hundreds of thousands, who have seen millions driven from their homes and thousands detained and tortured in prison camps, we feel it our duty, in the name of some 1,400 Franciscans, to lift up our voice in protest against these terrible crimes committed in Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina. We have also a deep sense of responsibility for the future well-being of the people with whom we have lived for centuries in these regions, and, moved by our Franciscan charisma, in addition to what we are doing ourselves, we wish to urge that same sense of responsibility on all involved that they may, according to their conscience, do everything they can to bring peace to these regions and that they might begin with patience and courage to lay the foundations of trust and mutual respect between all groups here for the sake of their future life together.

1) It appears to us that with the passage of time the real cause of this war and all the suffering it has produced, namely the Serbian expansionist aggression directed toward Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina, is increasingly forgotten. That this is the real cause is confirmed by U.N. resolutions and sanctions imposed on Serbia and Montenegro, and by various actions culminating in the threat of aerial attack against Serbian positions. From this initial cause a second has emerged, and Bosnia is now being divided by violence, genocide, ethnic cleansing, rape, and expulsion on all sides.

2) This cruel aggression of the Serbian invader, who has managed to seize huge quantities of arms belonging to former Yugoslavia, is the root cause of the conflict, carefully planned over a long period; it has succeeded in drawing Bosnian Croats and Muslims into a mutual conflict they should never have entered. One of the real causes of this

conflict, we believe, is the ineffectiveness of the international community and its willingness to sanction territorial gains achieved by mass killings and by the expulsions of Croats and Muslims from the homes they have lived in for centuries. Both Muslims and Croats suffered in these unscrupulous attacks.

3) In the conflict between Muslims and Croats, caused in part by the violent partition of the country, an ever increasing number of Croats are becoming victims. . . .

4) In the bloody settling of scores in Bosnia and Hercegovina, more Croats have been driven out than any other group. Many churches, monasteries, and other sacred edifices have been razed to the ground. Much of our priceless cultural heritage has been destroyed. Two dioceses (Sarajevo and Banja Luka), as well as both the male and female monastic orders, have been reduced to a symbolic remnant. . . .

5) In view of these facts we appeal to you and to all institutions competent to decide these matters not to recognize territories taken by force as a *fait accompli*, for this would be tantamount to legalizing war crimes. The most basic principles of justice demand that what has been seized must be returned, whether in Bosnia or Croatia. Failure to do this will mean that the aggressor has been rewarded and that the immoral "might is right" principle has been confirmed. If these territorial acquisitions are accepted as a *fait accompli*, this act will be a source of future unrest not only here but in other parts of the world as well. International institutions will be seen to be incapable and ineffective in their task.

6) In accordance with the above, we appeal to you to ensure the peaceful and safe return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes, as required by the U.N. Charter of Human Rights and by frequent U.N. resolutions made during the course of the war, and to annul all *fait accompli* gains obtained by invasion, plunder, killing, expulsion and the like.

7) In the name of truth, justice, and a better future for the world, we appeal to you to bring to justice all war criminals that they might answer for their crimes.

8) Inspired by the irenic spirit of our founder, St. Francis of Assisi, we are ready, after all these atrocities have ceased, to do all we can so that with patience, courage, and perseverance we might build bridges of trust between people of various nationalities, religions, and creeds, and help them to live together in peace. Even now in the atmosphere of hate and evil that reigns here, we are endeavoring to awaken and foster a spirit of forgiveness, reconciliation, and mutual consideration. We are encouraging our people to help build a common future for people of all nationalities.

In the words of the prophet Isaiah (2:4) inscribed in the U.N. palace, we beseech you to do all in your power that swords might be beaten into ploughshares and spears to pruning hooks, finally and forever.

We greet you respectfully with our Franciscan greeting, Peace and Godwill.