

Bishops say West neglects Africa

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VATICAN CITY, April 18 (Reuter) - Bishops attending a Vatican synod of the Roman Catholic Church in Africa accused the West on Monday of turning its back on the world's poorest continent.

One of the bishops also called for an end to Western sanctions against Libya.

Speaking at a news conference on the synod, which is discussing the future of the church on the continent, a bishop said the recent exodus of Europeans from Rwanda was another case where many whites used Africa for economic interests.

"I was struck by the fact that the other nationals were getting away and leaving the two sides to kill themselves," said Cardinal Christian Tumi, archbishop of Douala, Cameroon.

"To me it was one of the proofs that they are there for their own interest and when things are not going well they go away and begin to sell arms to the fighting parties," he said.

Rwanda has plunged into an orgy of ethnic violence between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi tribes who have a long history of enmity.

Thousands of people have died since the fighting began on April 6 when Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and Burundian President Cyprien Ntaryamira were killed in a rocket attack on their plane in Rwanda.

Tumi, who was answering questions on the work of the month-long synod, said the situation in Rwanda was further proof that Africans had to be responsible for their own peace and development.

"They (Westerners) are there for their personal interests. You will find that missionaries would rather die than leave because they are there for other interests," Tumi said.

"They are dying with Africans while those who came for economic interests are leaving. All this said and done, I do not blame them for leaving. It is normal and this proves again that Africans must build Africa," Tumi said.

Archbishop Giovanni Martinelli, the Vatican's chief representative in Libya, called for an end to the Western embargo against the north African country.

"I have suffered and I continue to suffer because of the embargo against Libya," he told the news conference.

The U.N. Security Council imposed sanctions against Libya in 1992 for the alleged role of two of its citizens in the 1988 Lockerbie air bombing, which killed 270 people.

“It (the embargo) is against the truth. The church must be able to say the embargo is unjust because it is against truth. I am not saying this to please (Libyan) political leaders,” Martinelli said.

Bishop Joseph Gasi of Sudan accused the international media of neglecting the plight of his country.

Sudan has been torn by an 11-year-old civil war between the Khartoum government in the Islamic north and the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in the Christian and animist south. The war has displaced most of the six million people of southern Sudan.

“The world of journalism is not coming to our assistance very much. They are not talking about the Sudan very much. So many evils are happening in the Sudan,” Gasi said.

“The question of the Sudan should be tackled by international groups and by the whole church. We would like to see the church in solidarity with us,” he said.

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