

Bishops urge West to stop selling arms to Africa

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VATICAN CITY, April 26 (Reuters) - Roman Catholic bishops from Africa urged the West on Tuesday to stop selling arms to the continent, saying weapons exports were fanning ethnic bloodshed on the scale seen in Rwanda.

The bishops, who are attending a Vatican synod on the future of the Catholic church on the continent, said the West was exacerbating African problems such as tribalism and ethnic rivalry.

One bishop, Michael Kpakala Francis of Monrovia, Liberia, also said the United Nations should finance local permanent peacekeeping forces in Africa to intervene in conflicts.

"Where do we get our armaments from? Who manufactures them? Where does the money they are giving our leaders come from and where is it banked?," Francis said.

"We do not exonerate ourselves.

The internal factors are there, unfortunately, but we also have external factors," he told a news conference on the work of the synod.

"We are dictated to - what we should eat, what we should wear, how we should sell our goods, at what prices, how many children we should have - all by external forces," he said.

"Our fundamental rights are trampled upon when we have structures imposed on us."

Bishop Mwana'a Nzeki Ndingi of Kenya also said the West should stop sending weapons to Africa.

"By and large, human rights in Africa are violated by dictatorial governments," by tribal and ethnic wars, by political and religious fanaticism," Ndingi said.

"But there are also external causes. At the international level Africa is being marginalised and does not arouse much interest.

"Nevertheless there is the

constant sending of sophisticated armaments that brings about war on the African continent," he said.

Francis said he believed the synod would appeal to the United Nations and other international organisations "to assist in peacemaking, and, I hope, peace enforcement in Africa".

"We hope the United Nations could finance peacekeeping and peace enforcing troops in Africa. It costs far less to pay for the upkeep of these troops than bring them from all over other parts of the world," Francis said.

Francis was responding to a question about whether the synod would

appeal to the U.N. and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to help overcome conflicts such as that in Rwanda, where a tribal bloodbath has killed an estimated 100,000 people.

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

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.

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