

POPE OFFERS PRAYERS OF SOLIDARITY  
FOR RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION VICTIMS

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) -- Pope John Paul II has called for prayers of solidarity with those who continue to practice their faith despite persecution.

Without naming any countries, the pope condemned nations which restrict religious freedom, as well as those which violate other rights by promoting racism or physical brutality.

In his Sunday message to people gathered in St. Peter's Square (Nov. 25), the pope referred to Catholics who "are numerous even in those places where they are confronted by absolute silence, where they are treated as if they did not exist, where they are deprived of elementary human rights, where they are imprisoned and tried because they unite together in prayer and in this reading of the word of God, or because they have copied liturgical texts for the use of those who wish to pray."

The pope said that "those systems which fail to recognize the equality of men, who are all sons of God, and which would deny this on pretexts of race, of culture, of opinions which are peacefully expressed, or which do not respect the need for the physical and moral dignity of the person" could never "conquer the hearts of men."

Pope John Paul noted that under all "systems of oppression and persecution, there exist men who render testimony to Christ at the price of courage and of suffering..."

The pope also expressed his sympathy for the victims of the recent earthquake in Colombia. He asked for "Christian solidarity" to help relieve "the suffering of those who find themselves in sorrow and without a home."

After his prepared message, Pope John Paul reminded the Saint Peter's Square crowd of his upcoming visit to Turkey (Nov. 28-30) to meet with leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Church. "I ask your prayers for my meeting with the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I, with the patriarchate and with the representatives of the Turkish government," he said.